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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

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Crossing the line

Personal encounters with the biggest industry on earth

Will Braun

When I travelled to northern B.C. last summer to write about First Nations fighting the Northern Gateway pipeline, I didn't realize my research would lead right back to my new backyard and my old spiritual stomping grounds.

Northern Gateway is a proposal to pipe oil from the Alberta bitumen sands to a shipping terminal on the B.C. coast. The First Nations I visited are fighting the project – which is backed by Calgary-based Enbridge – with a degree of resistance not seen in Canada since 1990 when Mohawk Warriors stared down soldiers over the barricades at Oka.

The pipeline issue, like the people and geography, gripped me. But as I discovered, this story starts 15 years earlier when I started visiting a spiritual retreat centre south of Kalamazoo, Michigan. I spent a number of months at the Hermitage over the course of several visits. The rustic guesthouse and serene woods on the 24-hectare grounds became a spiritual home for me. I encountered God on my walks through the forest. I also encountered a bare swath of land that bisected the property – a pipeline right-of-way. Beneath the Queen Anne's lace, oil coursed silently through Enbridge's Line 6B.

I didn't like it but nor did I think much of it.

During a visit in 2000, a huge reddish pipe – a second line – lay exposed in a trench in the widened right-of-way. Then the intrusion felt visceral.

Only this year, as I researched Enbridge, did I realize the pipe-

line I had walked over so many times in Michigan is the line that so infamously spilled into the Kalamazoo River, downline of the Hermitage, in 2010, badly smearing the reputation of the world's largest oil and gas pipeline company and, ultimately, leading Enbridge chainsaw crews back to the woods.

Soon after learning of Enbridge's connection to my past, I learned of its entanglement in my future. Since moving to a farm near Morden, Manitoba last fall, I live five miles from the company's main link to the U.S. Seven parallel lines, equivalent to a single pipe six and a half feet across (over two metres), flow from Alberta through Saskatchewan and much of southern Manitoba and then across the border to Chicago, the Hermitage and back into Canada at Sarnia, Ont.

I regularly cross buried pipelines that can carry up to 2.5 million barrels of oil daily (though one line now carries condensate in the opposite direction). That's about \$200 million worth of oil, enough oil to fill a train of tanker cars 60 kilometres long. That's more oil than all of Canada uses and about a tenth of what the U.S. uses – the equivalent of nearly five Northern Gateways.

If I travel five miles in a different direction, I cross another pipeline – built by TransCanada Pipelines in 2010 – that can carry an additional 590,000 barrels per day to the U.S.

I find all this jarring.

The Enbridge corridor is marked only by seven small signs

See **The line** on p.2



A trail through a part of the Hermitage woods that will soon be home to Enbridge's expanded Line 6B.



In 2000, Enbridge laid a second Enbridge pipeline through the Hermitage woods.

Living as covenant people:

A Christian response to Idle No More

Sarah Shepherd

Several years ago, I was at a three-day meeting where feelings were running very high about difficult and painful issues. Half-way through, one of the participating Aboriginal leaders changed the agenda. He led us through a talking circle: only one person spoke at any one time, we were encouraged to speak from the heart if we were speaking, and we listened from the deepest parts of our hearts if we were listening. The tenor of the entire gathering, and of our relation-

ships with one another, completely shifted as a result.

Chief Theresa Spence, who has been fasting since mid-December, is asking for a similar transformation. Her request may seem less clear than asking for a specific bill to be passed, or for a particular sum of money to be earmarked for an urgent need. Nonetheless, her call comes from the heart, and it is for a demonstration of respect in the wake of a long history, compounded most recently by decisions made by the Canadian government,



of oppression and marginalization. This respect would be embodied

See **People** on p.2

News

The line *continued*

in the ditch, but when I cross it I see in my mind a neon sign flashing: "You are now crossing an artery vital to the economic machine that makes the 'greatest of these' uber-rich and threatens to cook the future."

Not everyone sees things that way, but for me, these advances of Enbridge – in B.C., Michigan and Manitoba – raise a simple question: When has the encroachment of the oil industry gone too far?

And how can our faith communities, with their varied views, discuss energy and climate change – the ultimate encroachment – without falling into predictable ruts?

Pipeline of peril

It was the hope of generating such dialogue that first got me on the Enbridge trail. I saw the national significance of the Gateway battle and wanted churches to be aware. My travels confirmed my sense that this is a defining national issue.

The primary rationale behind Gateway is economic – an estimated \$270-billion boost to the national economy over 30 years. Enbridge says the line is a "nation-building" endeavour.

Similarly, the federal government, which continues to back the project, is using it to test drive its vision for Canada's future, one centred around aggressive expansion of the conventional energy sector.

That vision is on a collision course with the 20 or so First Nations between Prince George, B.C. and Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) who are leading the fight against the project. Their main concerns are the threat of a pipeline spill into one of the treasured salmon rivers and the threat of a supertanker accident off the coast.

The half-dozen Aboriginal leaders I spoke with all said four things: 1) they oppose the project; 2) there is nothing that will make the project acceptable to them (money will not change their minds); 3) they're prepared to go to court and stand in front of bulldozers; and 4) they don't think the project will proceed.

Given the First Nations' legal standing – they have never signed treaties or ceded rights to their land – and given the sheer moral cost to the government of potentially arresting a significant number of respected Aboriginal leaders, the prediction that the project will not proceed is not mere bravado.



Sign over Bulkley River Wet'suwet'en fishing spot.

"People ask how far we are willing to go to oppose the project," Hereditary Chief Na'Moks of the Wet'suwet'en Nation told me in his Smithers, B.C. office, "but I want to know how far Enbridge is willing to go to push it through."

When I asked if he thinks the pipeline – which would pass through 170 kilometres of Wet'suwet'en land – will ever be built, Chief Na'Moks replied, "we are not a defeated people." Among their victories is a landmark 20-year court battle to prove their existence.

Russell Ross Jr. – a Councillor with the Haisla First Nation, located at the western end of the proposed pipeline – doesn't want the project to go ahead on his watch. I asked how he would feel if the project would proceed and tankers were to travel deep into the heart of Haisla territory. "I'd have to move away," he said, after a pause. Aboriginal leaders I spoke with are not opposed to development per se – the Haisla are partners in a major natural gas export project – but they do not accept the risk of irreparable damage to lands and culture. They have drawn a line.

Though some analysts expect the project to die, government and Enbridge continue on the path toward a major confrontation.

The other cheek

In contrast, the board of the Hermitage is not resisting the encroachment of Enbridge, which is now moving aggressively to re-

place and expand Line 6B. The project will require permanently widening the right-of-way across Hermitage property by 17 metres, in addition to a work easement that will be cleared but can later be replanted.

After filing a court papers in July to oppose the project, the Hermitage board later withdrew. Hermitage co-director Naomi Wenger says "it became really quite clear that [Enbridge] was sure of getting a permit," and that anything the Hermitage did would simply "delay the inevitable." Lack of resources was also a factor.

Instead of fighting, the Hermitage board agreed to hold a service of lamentation and use compensation money received from Enbridge for alternative energy projects. The board also stated that pipeline workers will not be vilified.

Wenger admits that will take effort. Six mornings a week she walks prayerfully through the woods. To be met by heavy machinery and felled trees will not be easy.

Her anguish over the intrusion and the loss of forest is met by another anguish. "Even though I didn't ask them to do this, I'm part of the problem," she says. "We all are part of the problem because we have not yet figured out a way to minimize or eliminate the use of this natural resource."

Wenger's comments lack the punch of simple resolve, like I heard in B.C., yet I find them equally compelling. Part of me would like to see Wenger and her colleagues fight like hell, but they are pointing to a truth that lies beyond the impulse to fight.

The end of growth

Driving the encroachment of the oil industry is the dogma of economic growth. Even though energy consumption is causing climate change, and even though we live in a country of tremendous abundance, government and industry leaders not only talk as if limitless development is viable but as if a grim future awaits if we reject it.

An Enbridge spokesman told me his CEO "pleaded" with Chief Na'Moks and other Aboriginal leaders at the company's AGM to accept the greater economic good of Gateway.

But my bet is that within a generation the dogma of economic growth will fade. Surely at some point climate change, if nothing else, will force humanity to accept

the wisdom of limits. At minimum, voices questioning growth will grow louder. Will the church be among those voices?

Some church people are ready to fight oil encroachment. Some may reconsider their investments. Others align with Enbridge's interests. Others still – perhaps the majority – are simply preoccupied with other matters. Then there are the few like Naomi Wenger who don't fall neatly in any camp.

She puts the coming destruction of the beloved trees in the context of a tornado that wiped out a swath of Hermitage forest in 2010, an event that grieved her. "There's the creative energy of living on this earth that always can be played out," Wenger says. "When there's destruction there's room for something new."

She tells me about plans to build prayer gardens on either side of the pipeline.

"Just like I can move on from the tornado, I can move on from this [pipeline expansion]," she says sadly, hesitantly. "And somehow I've got to be able to move on from using oil. That'll probably take me to the end of my life."

Like the Hermitage itself, Wenger's words create a refuge, a space for spiritual deepening and affirmation amidst real-world troubles. Perhaps that is the same sort of space in which healthy dialogue about energy and climate can happen within the church.

Wenger trusts God is working in the pipeline expansion, though she is not sure how. "I do believe that the Creator is pulling us forward," she says. Her question is this: "how can I feel the pull of God on me through this, to come through well, rather than fight and be angry and damage other people?"

From 1,500 kilometres down the pipelines that connect our backyards, Wenger's vision resonates with me. I too want to feel the pull of God, to feel the full sadness of encroachment, to lament along an Enbridge corridor. I want to trust for something new, to move slowly on from oil, and finally to "come through well." This too is my hope for Chief Na'Moks, Russell Ross Jr. and indeed for God's good earth itself.

Will Braun is Senior Writer for Canadian Mennonite magazine, in which the original version of this article appeared. He lives in Morden, Man.



People *continued*

in a meeting among representatives of First Nations, the Crown and Canada's elected leaders that would be conducted in a spirit of openness and transparency.

This spirit is that of "treaty" or "covenant." You may have heard it said that "we are all treaty people." A treaty is not just a set of rules that only apply to Aboriginal peoples and the currently elected government; it's a commitment that includes all Canadians. Bert Adema, Director of the CRC-supported Indian Métis Christian Fellowship in Regina, says, "as God covenants with us, so we make covenants – or treaties – with one another.

Being faithful to God means keeping our word without compromise and dishonour, without moving the boundary markers."

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) staff have been trying to be faithful during this time in several ways: by visiting Theresa Spence and her supporters on Victoria Island, participating with people of faith in a solidarity fast on Jan. 11, being present in public witness on Parliament Hill and writing statements of support. Our weekly reflection centred on Isaiah's challenge not to fast physically unless we are committed to "loose the bonds of injustice" (Is. 58:6). Theresa Spence's own

words reflect the principles that have been guiding us: "The Creator put us here for a reason. The Creator wants us to love and respect each other. The Creator wants us to work together here on Mother Earth."

CPJ's work centres on ending poverty and advocating for ecological wellbeing in Canada, and we believe neither of these goals can be achieved without full participation of and respect for Canada's Aboriginal peoples. We are also keenly aware of how the events of the last few weeks have often focused on issues that affect everyone in Canada, regardless of our backgrounds.

How do we respond?

"Issues are complicated," as ecological and Indigenous justice activist Severn Suzuki recently tweeted; "Courage is simple." There is much complexity to these issues. The machinations of government are hard to comprehend at the best of times. First Nations, Inuit and Métis people are not a homogenous group – they are many nations from many contexts, with their own government structures. Similarly, the Idle No More movement isn't a structured hierarchy with a five-year plan – simply a growing group of people from

See People on p.3

Column

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



Jesus' DNA was just like ours



For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way (Heb. 2:17).

Last month I discussed the new findings in genetics that have transformed our understanding of our DNA and how it regulates our biology. These findings, placed next to our celebration of Jesus' birth, led me to muse over the nature of our Lord's DNA.

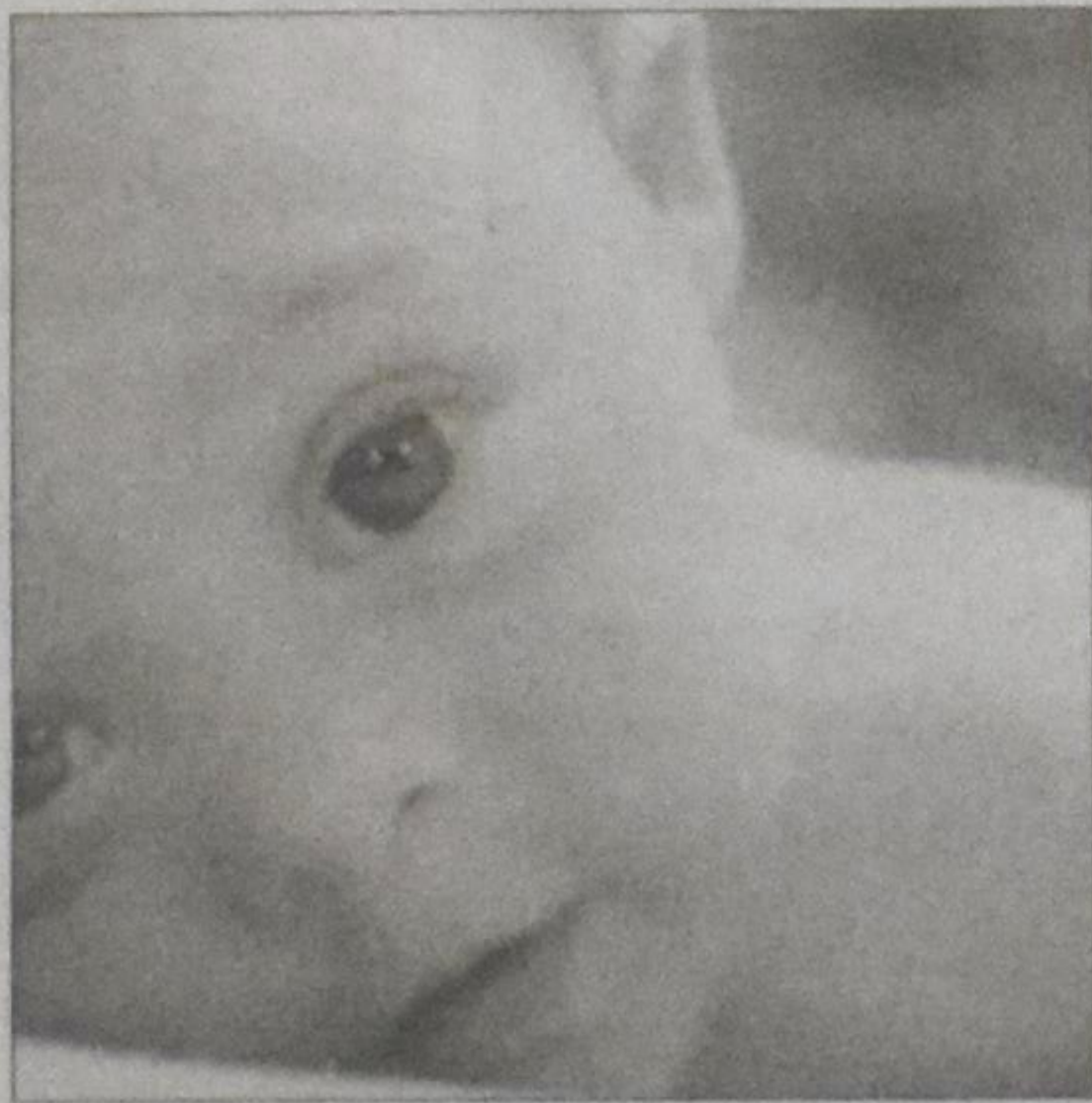
One of the main theological threads vigorously defended throughout the history of Christianity is the notion that, except for sin, Christ was like us in every way. The Athanasian Creed says it this way: he was "completely God, completely human." If Jesus Christ was completely human, he must have had a body the same as any other human. If in Joseph's carpenter shop Jesus hit his thumb with a hammer, it would have hurt and bruised. If he was fully human, then his DNA should be similar to the average human (as similar as the DNA of any two humans).

In 2007, at an event sponsored by the Christian Neuroscience Association (during the Society of Neuroscience conference in San Diego), I heard Dr. Rebecca Flietstra speak about the neuroscience of the Incarnation. Taking seriously the humanity of Jesus, Flietstra pointed out that the Father took a risk in the birth of Jesus. Her argument, which made a lot of sense to me, was that if Jesus was fully human, his genetic nature had to be similar to ours in all ways, including the possibility that he could have had a birth defect. Flietstra's main point was that God loved us enough to be willing to take this risk.

Given that Dr. Flietstra agreed with the standard theological tenet that Jesus was born without sin, her position leads me to wonder whether at least some genetic defects are not a consequence of sin but are instead part of the natural creation. Are our genetic "defects" in fact a consequence of sin? If we were without sin, would there be no birth defects? Would we need glasses? Would there be any genetic disposition toward obesity?

Good but not perfect

It is traditionally argued that these genetic and other medical "problems" are part of the brokenness of creation and due to our sin. However, this position may be difficult to maintain in the face of current scientific knowledge. First, the combined genetic processes that can result in medical problems also seem to be individually important for other beneficial consequences. For example, the genetics that predispose certain individuals to obesity also increase their chances of surviving a famine.



Are genetic defects part of natural creation or a consequence of sin?

Second, if genetic problems and illnesses were a consequence of sin, how do we explain death and illnesses before the fall? There is considerable evidence suggesting some dinosaurs had cancer. The abnormal cellular growth that is cancer seems to have been present before humans existed on the earth.

In Scripture's description of the act of creation, God looks at his world and describes it as good and later very good. But good is not the same as perfect. Perhaps genetic abnormalities are part of the creation order. It may be that death was the natural situation; perhaps only if Adam and Eve had eaten of the Tree of Life (and not of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) would they have lived forever, without experiencing death, a change in the natural order (see Gen. 3:22-24). Genetic abnormalities may be like other natural events, such as floods which have both a beneficial and adverse effect.

If genetic differences between people are part of the creation order, then God took the same risk in the birth of his son that every parent faces in the birth of a child. Perhaps Jesus had genetic mechanisms that gave him a predisposition to obesity, or was near-sighted. Appearance clearly is ge-

netically determined and according to Isaiah 53:2 Jesus was probably not very attractive.

What this tells us is that God, when he created the world, loves us for who we are, not for some perfection that we are not. His son joined us on this earth. As Job says, "And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh will I see God" (19:26). Our bodies, like our Lord's, are temples of God, to be celebrated as his gift to us in this season when we have remembered his birth as a helpless, dispossessed, refugee child.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca), who needs glasses, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

People continued

coast to coast to coast feeling empowered to share their own needs, demands, joys and anger. But let us not be intimidated by the complexity of the issues into not responding as best we can with courage.

The Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice posted a statement on Jan. 11 that named "deep prayer" as an essential response for people of faith (crcjustice.sharedby.co). Pray for open spirits, justice, integrity and wisdom within those who have leadership roles; for strength and sustenance for those who are engaging in acts of courage; for an opening of minds and hearts within each one of us.

Listening to people on the margins, and to those with differing perspectives, can be an act of courage. Seek out opportunities to listen in person, as well as to learn through media. Many of us live in communities where relationships can be built through schools, community spaces, and outreach ministries (see sidebar for recommended resources on community building).

The CRC statement also calls for "a passionate and active response to God's call to live as covenant (treaty) people." Again, such responses can be varied: writing letters naming our concerns and demands for change to MPs, scheduling meetings with MPs, sharing what we understand with others in our congregations and communities, participating in (or organizing) non-violent public witness.

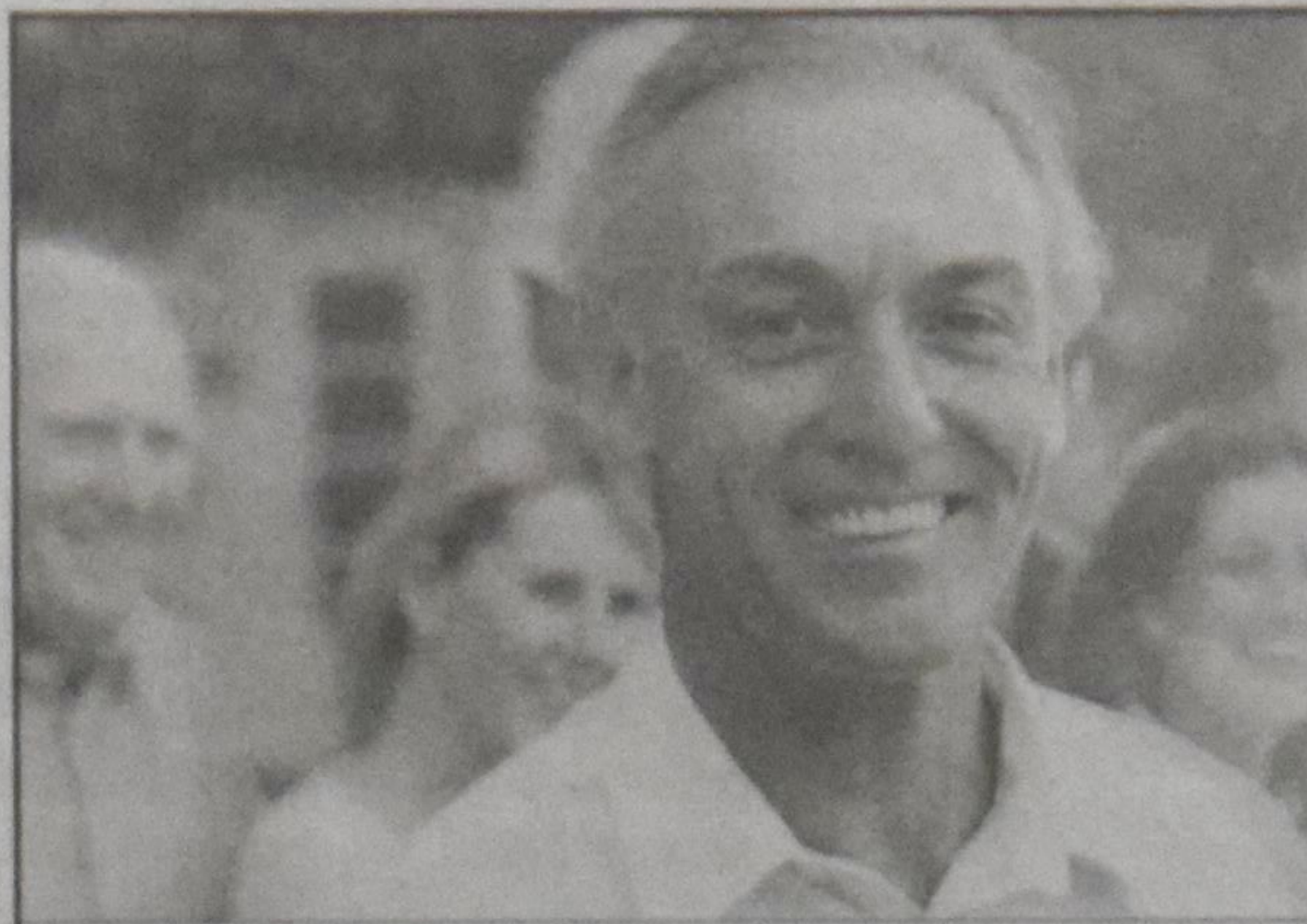
Working together, through prayer, learning and action, we can honour an authentic and life-giving treaty that will be for the good of all.

Sarah Shepherd is the Communications Coordinator for Citizens for Public Justice. She lives in Ottawa.

Helpful resources

- Alberta Métis writer Chelsea Vowel apihtawikosisan.com
- APTN News aptn.ca/pages/news
- Former CPJ Aboriginal Justice staff Lorraine Land's blog oktlaw.com
- The CRC's Aboriginal Ministry crena.org/CanadianMinistries






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Editorials

Relationship, religion or both?



Shiao Chong

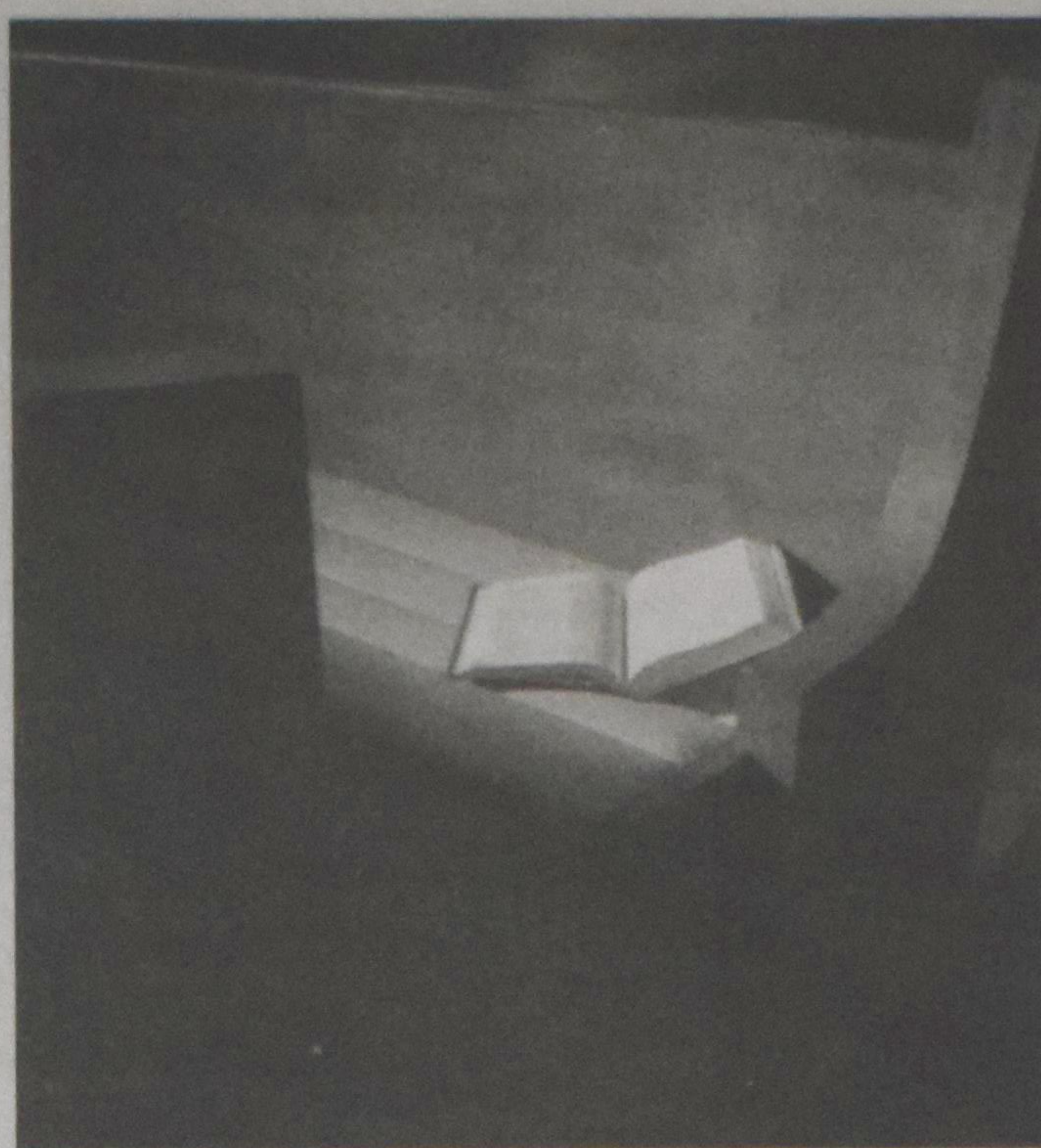
As a young Christian, I grew up with the ever-popular mantra that Christianity is not a religion but rather a personal relationship with God. But I am now strongly opposed to this dichotomy. Why? There are four reasons.

First, it's a false dichotomy. To say that Christianity is only a relationship and not a religion is like saying marriage is only a relationship and not an institution! It's simply false. Yes, I understand the desire to get back to the authentic love for God rather than simply religious ritualism. But a marriage based only on a loving relationship without the rings, legalities or blessings of families and friends that mark it a social institution would be called "living in sin"! At least, we used to call it that. It was God's idea in the Old Testament to set up the priesthood with its offerings and sacrifices, as well as the covenant laws and the ritual of circumcision as more formal (yes, religious) ways of expressing his relationship with Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus came not to abolish these OT Laws or the Prophets but to more deeply fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). And Jesus also gave us at least two rituals – the Lord's Supper and Baptism. And the apostle James did not throw out religion but defined what true religion is all about: "to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

False definition

Second, this false dichotomy sounds so appealing because it is based on a false definition of religion. For instance, religion is often defined as using "rules to force our steps, guilt to keep us in line and rituals to remind us of our failure to live up to those rules" (Bruxy Cavey, *The End of Religion*, 14). Religion here is defined so negatively that it is simply a straw man to be knocked over. It's a biased, polemical definition, like the famous Marxist mantra of religion as the opiate of the masses. It is defining something negatively in order to attack it. This is not a truthful method but one that belittles truth in favour of expediency.

A more descriptive way of defining religion is as "a particular system of beliefs, practices, and (for want of a better term) passions..." (John G. Stackhouse, Jr, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*, 99). In this way,



If we keep saying that organized religion is bad and a personal relationship with Jesus is all that matters, should we be surprised that our youth are leaving the institutional church in droves?

Christianity is also a religion and Jesus, far from abolishing religion, came to establish one. Jesus taught beliefs that his disciples need to adhere to (for example, that he is the Son of God). Jesus also established practices that his followers are to keep (like the Lord's Supper). And, finally, he very much encouraged certain passions or affections among his disciples (love your neighbour, love God).

Unhelpful for seekers

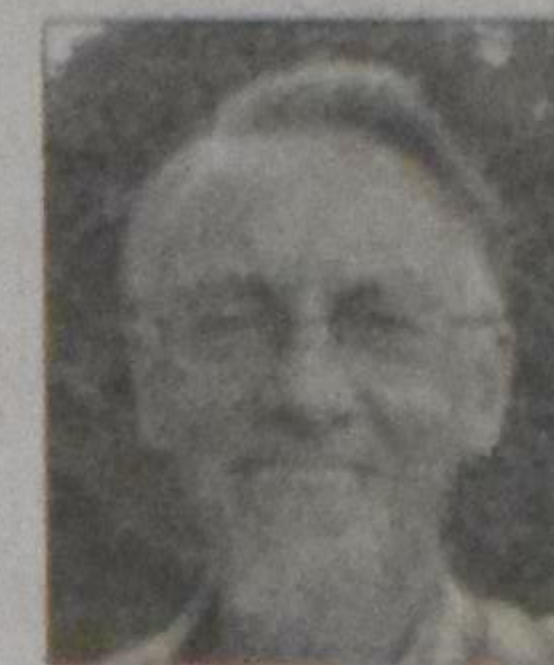
Thirdly, the argument confuses non-Christians. I have met many non-Christians of various stripes who are simply confused by this mantra of Christianity as a relationship rather than a religion. Being confused is one thing, but what's bad is that it turns some of these seekers away from Christianity! One mainland Chinese scholar once told me, "After years of being in atheistic China, I am looking for religion! And if Christianity is not a religion, why should I bother with it?" The "relationship not religion" tag line only really works for those seekers who are disillusioned with religion. But for those seekers who are not religiously disillusioned but seeking a better religion, this is confusion, or worse, a turn off.

Hurts the church

Finally, this dichotomy is ultimately damaging to Christianity. If we keep telling our youth that organized religion is bad and a personal relationship with Jesus is all that matters, should we be surprised that they are leaving the institutional church in droves? Should we be surprised that they are increasingly spiritual (love Jesus) but not religious (hate church)? Even for those who believe in this mantra, what happens when they grow older and wiser and notice the hypocrisy? For instance, aren't we being hypocritical if we hold onto governmental tax privileges for religions and yet claim that we are not a religion?

Furthermore, as Larry Osborne observed: "Just look at our models of spiritual formation. Almost all our books, seminars, workshops and programs are heavily weighted toward religious practice and self-discipline. They show us how to do religion in hopes that it will produce relationship" (*A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God: Spirituality for the Rest of Us*, 27). We are not being malicious or intentionally hypocritical about this. As I've said earlier, it's inevitable that there's an organized, religious, institutional side to our relationship to God. But when you claim you're not a religion and still end up offering religious practices,

Trapped by convictions



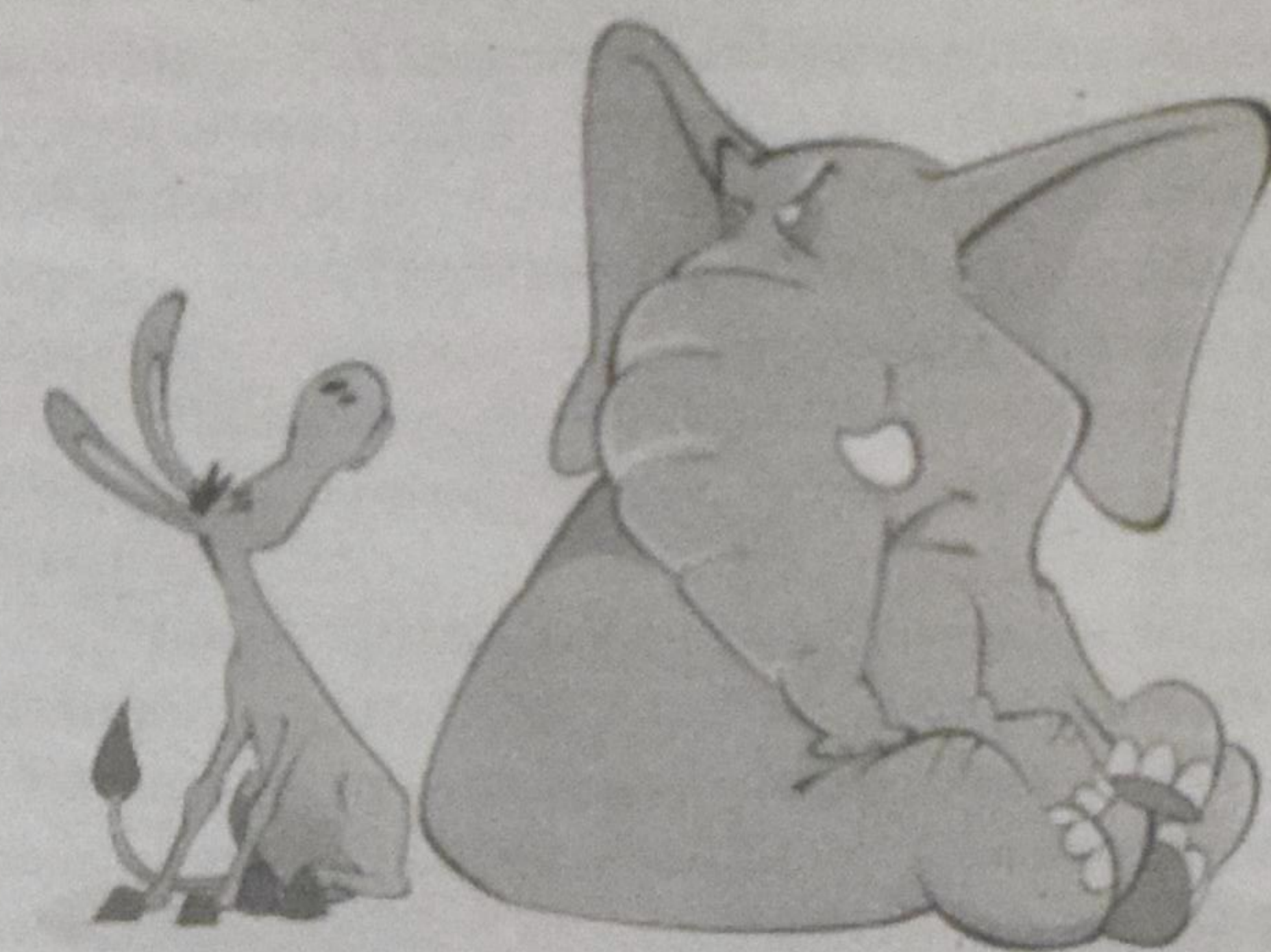
Bert Witvoet

In Canada we sometimes speak of two solitudes, meaning French Canada and English Canada. In actuality, there are many solitudes in Canada, of course, but thanks to Hugh MacLennan's novel *Two Solitudes*, we reserve that expression for the two founding nations.

When we look across our southern border, we can also speak of two solitudes. I am referring to the deep chasm that separates two groups of Americans: Republicans and Democrats. These two groups don't speak the same language anymore. They don't watch the same newscasts, they don't read the same magazines and books and they don't worship at the same political altar.

We saw these solitudes in action during a lengthy and expensive 2012 election campaign that left the country in pretty much the same political stand-off it was in before. We saw them again when the U.S. was trying to avoid the fiscal cliff. And then there is the debate about gun control after the massacre of 20 school children and six school staff in Newtown, Connecticut.

For many Americans the word "compromise" is a swear word. It seems that the two sides are stuck in the prison of their convictions. They don't hear the other side anymore, and, consequently, they can't learn from each other. Both sides are equally convinced that their side is absolutely right. This is a deplorable situation. If a democratic country does not make sure that freedom of speech is accompanied by the willingness to listen to each other, it may as well be governed by a dictatorship. Whether one person at the top brainwashes you or a group makes very little difference. In both cases you abdicate your responsibility to think for yourself.



For many Americans, "compromise" is a swear word. But a similar situation easily develops in our own life.

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then, sooner or later, young people are going to sniff out the hypocrisy and leave. Many already have.

Let me suggest a better way. Instead of pitting relationship with Jesus against religion, why not be more accurate and pit *living religion* against *fossilized religion*? Also, we should not forget the classic Reformed mantra that "all of life is religious"! We should redefine "religion" biblically rather than acquiesce to faulty definitions. There are so many other more accurate, productive and less polarizing, ways of rallying Christians to the core of their faith than simplistic false dichotomies.

Shiao Chong is the Christian Reformed Campus Minister & Director of Leadership, Culture and Christianity, a student club at York University, Toronto. He has published numerous articles for various Christian publications, including Christian Courier.

Letters/Announcements

Interested in writing?

Christian Courier is looking for **two new columnists** to contribute one 750-word article each (per month). We would like an emphasis on pop culture, fatherhood, economics or health/medicine but all proposals will be considered. Interested and experienced Canadian writers should send two sample columns to editor@christiancourier.ca by March 30, 2013. Content should reflect the principles of God's sovereignty and our mandate to interact with and reform culture. View some of our current columnists at christiancourier.ca.

With thanks

This issue marks the last column by Bert Hielema. He has decided to write a weekly column exclusively for the web at hielema.ca/blog. "For more than 30 years," Hielema says, "*Christian Courier* has been tolerant enough to publish my not-always-uplifting writings." Being uplifted is important, but sometimes we need to be provoked – and here Hielema excelled. He is the author of *Day Without End*, *The Shortest Day*, and translator of *The Economics of Honor*. CC thanks Bert for faithfully applying a biblical perspective to current events in "Our World Today."

We must also bid farewell to Nick Schuurman, our Review Editor for the past two years, as he takes more time to focus on his studies. He has done a wonderful job of making everything from biblical commentary to the latest top 40 singles accessible to our readers on the bi-weekly Review page. "I have loved the position," he says. "To be able to engage a wide variety of art in a thoughtful way has been an incredible opportunity." CC thanks Nick for his insight and dedication to redeeming art in over 50 issues of this paper.

— Angela Reitsma Bick, Editor

Trapped by convictions *continued*

Area codes of faith

A similar situation easily develops in our own life. Earlier this year my wife and I attended the celebration of the 50th wedding anniversary of friends of ours in Toronto. We used to be part of a close circle of friends that included the celebrating couple when we all lived in Woodbridge, a small town that sits as a wart on the nose of Rexdale, which is part of Metropolitan Toronto. Several of us had attended Calvin College in the late '50s. We went to the same church and experienced similar joys and troubles there. Our children played with each other. We had similar convictions about school, church and state. But then our family moved to St. Catharines, a sleepy town in the Niagara peninsula, and our friends moved to the heart of Toronto, a bustling metropolitan world-class city. We had infrequent contact and our children got married and started leaving their parental nest.

Today I notice that as friends we don't necessarily hold the same opinions; we have different views on the reliability of Scripture, for example. And thus it happened that during a brief speech at our friends' celebration I made reference to the fact that our roads had diverged in the yellow woods of life and that I had ended up with an area-code-905 kind of faith and that our friends had embraced an area-code-416 kind of faith. It was a whimsical remark that elicited a laugh of recognition from the audience because it contained a kernel of truth. It illustrated that we are influenced by our environments, and, to a certain extent, we are what we hear, read and see. We so easily slide into our own solitudes.

The question all of us must face from time to time is, "How can we escape getting trapped by limited convictions?" I have come up with four suggestions.

One, expose yourself to the thinking of other-minded people. You might learn something you had overlooked.

Two, it is important to have convictions, but guard yourself against developing these convictions into self-evident truths. We all see through a glass darkly.

Three, study the Scriptures to anchor yourself in the abiding guidelines of the Kingdom of God. The Bible, if read carefully and wisely, will yield many treasures of knowledge that keep us from sliding into all the imperialistic "isms" that pass for respectable knowledge.

Four, pray and study in community for the guidance of the Spirit of Truth as you negotiate the confusing pathways of the secular and theocratic options on offer to the nations of our world.

Happy travel into 2013! ➤

Bert Witvoet lives in sleepy St. Catharines, where he has declined to review A Christian View of the War Against Islam by Richard T. Hise, after reading the author's claim on page 20 that the United States is the greatest nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth.

CC seeking applications for Review Editor

If you love film, fiction, poetry, theatre, music and memoirs, and you frequently give others advice on what to see/read/listen to, then this job might be for you. *Christian Courier* is looking for an articulate Review Editor to engage with a variety of media from a Reformed, Christian perspective by editing three and writing one review per month. Reviews should include a thorough summary and a thoughtful, spiritually-informed critique with a redemptive bent (turn to page 7 for two examples).

It's worth noting that this opportunity is unique. "The role of the critic in the place of the contemporary world of media has been reduced to 5-star ranking systems," Nick Schuurman, outgoing Review Editor, says. "That this is a distinctly Christian publication allows for the role of Review Editor to be something much richer than that; works of art can be understood in terms of expressions of our creaturely capabilities, for good and for ill, and viewed in terms of God's redemptive agenda."

For more information, email Angela Reitsma Bick at editor@christiancourier.ca. Resumes will be accepted until March 30, 2013. ➤



Write for CC and build on a strong history of Christian journalism in Canada that goes back nearly 70 years.

Relationships, not confrontation

I was recently given a renewed subscription to CC and it's good to read you again.

Regarding the letter, "Moderate Muslims need to speak up" by Harry Antonides (Dec. 10, 2012), I wanted to reply and agree that our best allies are our moderate Muslim friends. However, I don't think that challenging the Muslim Society of Guelph is the right approach, at least not initially.

Yes we all have concerns about the Islamist agenda in Canada and the dissemination of that in the mosques, but the solution to that problem is found in relationships. Challenge and confrontation may score political points but it doesn't go far in changing hearts and minds. Instead, let us focus on building friendships and out of those friendships may we issue challenges.

In this, the column by Brent van Sta-

alduinen ("Things said, things unsaid"), was helpful. As we come to terms with our own mistakes and as we deal with our own uncomfortable truths, then we are able to walk alongside Muslims. We are not perfect, we need grace. From this posture of humility, we have much more to give to those who follow Islam.

Yes, there is much we disagree with in Islam. But there is also a lot we have in common, such as concerns about the dominant secularism of our society. I encourage the members of First CRC in Guelph to seek peace with their new neighbours. Then let's see what God will do in the midst of those relationships.

J. Greg Sinclair
Project Manager
Salaam Project, CRCNA

The last issue of CC noted incorrectly that Dr. Stanley Wiersma died in 2011, when it should have said 1986. We sincerely apologize for that error.

See more letters on page 6.

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Column/Letters

Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



Why I write about God, and why I stopped



I write about God a lot. I write so I will know him more.

But there comes a time when I need to stop writing. And it happened last week while I was listening to All Sons and Daughters' song *Your Glory*. I was sitting in my easy chair, the Christmas tree alight and the children asleep and peace on earth, except . . . I wanted more. I always want more. I'm a good-news junkie.

So I stopped typing, I closed my eyes and I raised my hands, listening to All Sons and Daughters and in my mind, I saw God's light, a luminous light pooling like butter on the ground and there I was, running around outside the scope of that light, following flickers, pale white flashlight-flickers like fame and fortune and people's opinions of me.

And more often than not for all of my running I'm left in the dark. And right there, in my living room, I put my face in my hands and asked God to help me step into his light, into his glory, and to stop worrying about what other people think. To stop letting humanity define my eternal worth. Because bones don't make the soul.

I sat there in my brown housecoat, Sons and Daughters singing and my eyes closed and face in my hands and then, the light shifted. God's glory. It moved, and it came to rest upon me.

I didn't have to, do, anything. I just had to ask. God wants to give us everything. Why do we find it so hard to believe he loves us? To let him love us? Maybe because the world tells us we're only as good as the mother on the screen, or the wife in the church pew, or the size of our jeans?

Go slowly

And I realized in that moment of God coming to rest on me in my living room that this is what he did at Christmas. He came to us. He knew we couldn't get to him. We couldn't do enough good to reach him. So he did the completely unexpected, and came as a defenseless infant into a room that was a barn.

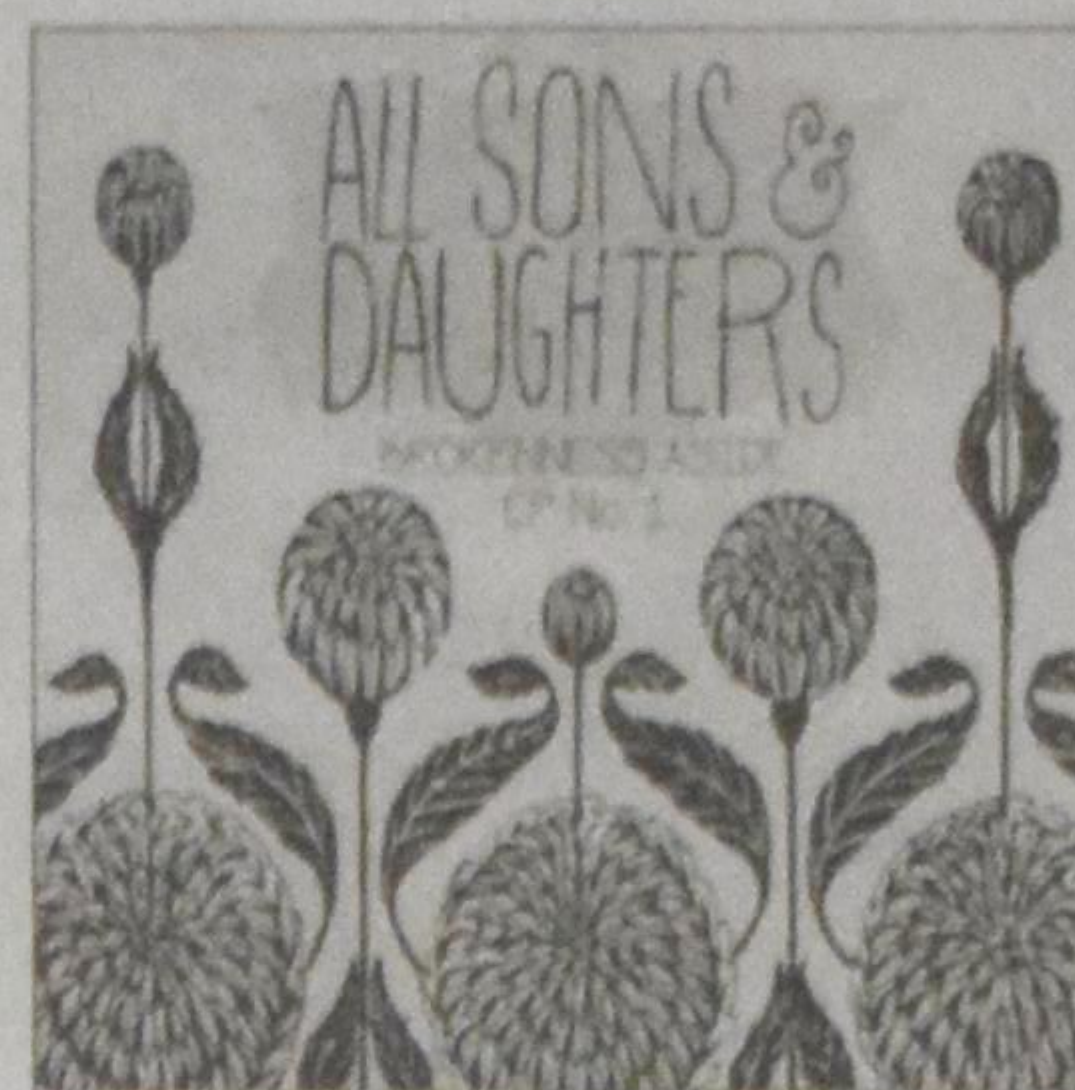
Talk about feeling like a failure. I wonder if Mary doubted herself. If she doubted God's calling on her life to be the son of God's mother, because she gave birth in a pile of straw and manure.

The Bible doesn't talk about that, but I think we can be reassured that she chased those flashlight-flickers too . . . until she held Jesus in his arms and felt the strength of the universe in his muscles and saw the love of God in his old-soul eyes and felt God's pleasure shake the barn rafters.

And again, God's glory found Mary and Jesus and Joseph in that barn. Angels on the roof, lighting up the night in a chorus of hallelujah.

So I'm going into this New Year slowly, because I don't want to step out of God's glory. I don't want to stop feeling his pleasure. I want to let him provide for me, and sing over me. And I want to draw my children close and let them feel God's glory too.

Please visit emilywierenga.com for more info about Emily who lives in Neerlandia, Alta.



*My life is yours
My hope is in you only
My heart you hold
'Cause You made this sinner holy
Holy, holy*

chorus:

*Your glory is so beautiful
I fall onto my knees in awe
And the heartbeat of my life
Is to worship in your light
'Cause Your glory is so beautiful
Your glory is so beautiful*



Freedom 55: A new and different opportunity for service

Your editorial on retirement ("A Florida of the Mind," Nov. 12) was spot-on. I've seen too many seniors who say they've worked hard all their lives and have "earned" a slower schedule, including winters down south and regular cruise voyages in summer. Apparently they haven't heard that we live by grace, not by works. There is something wrong when older people think the world owes them and they no longer need to contribute. Fortunately there are many, many others who have a different attitude. I see women raising grandchildren part- or full-time, couples going to developing countries on working mission trips, a widower traveling to California on his own dime to help dry surplus produce for donation to food banks, another, in his mid-eighties, still helping out with Vacation Bible School. Without seniors, much of Canada's volunteer organizations would fall apart. It's often the "young seniors" who visit the ill and the lonely, take part in prison ministries, comfort the bereaved. Retirement does not mean a vacuum to be filled with too much TV and coffee, but a new and different opportunity for service. For me, this includes active participation in church life, functioning as occasional backup chauffeur for my grandchildren, and spending much time with older friends, especially those who have been forced into nursing homes by ill health. I even continue to write, as I've always done, and give my farmer son a helping hand when he needs it. Regardless of our own health challenges, there is always something we can do, if only to listen to those who need an ear, stay informed about world affairs and spend time praying for the world. As your other editorial suggests ("In the Desert: Prayer"), sometimes we only need to form a background choir amidst the chaos around us, simply by pleading "Lord, have mercy!"

Anne van Arragon Hutten
Kentville, Nova Scotia

No theological basis for retirement

Here in Florida we are reading your very welcome editorial, "A Florida of the Mind" (Nov. 12, CC). You have some valuable things to say whether retirement is an entitlement. How can retirement, as it is understood and desired by so many today, be justified by God and his truth?

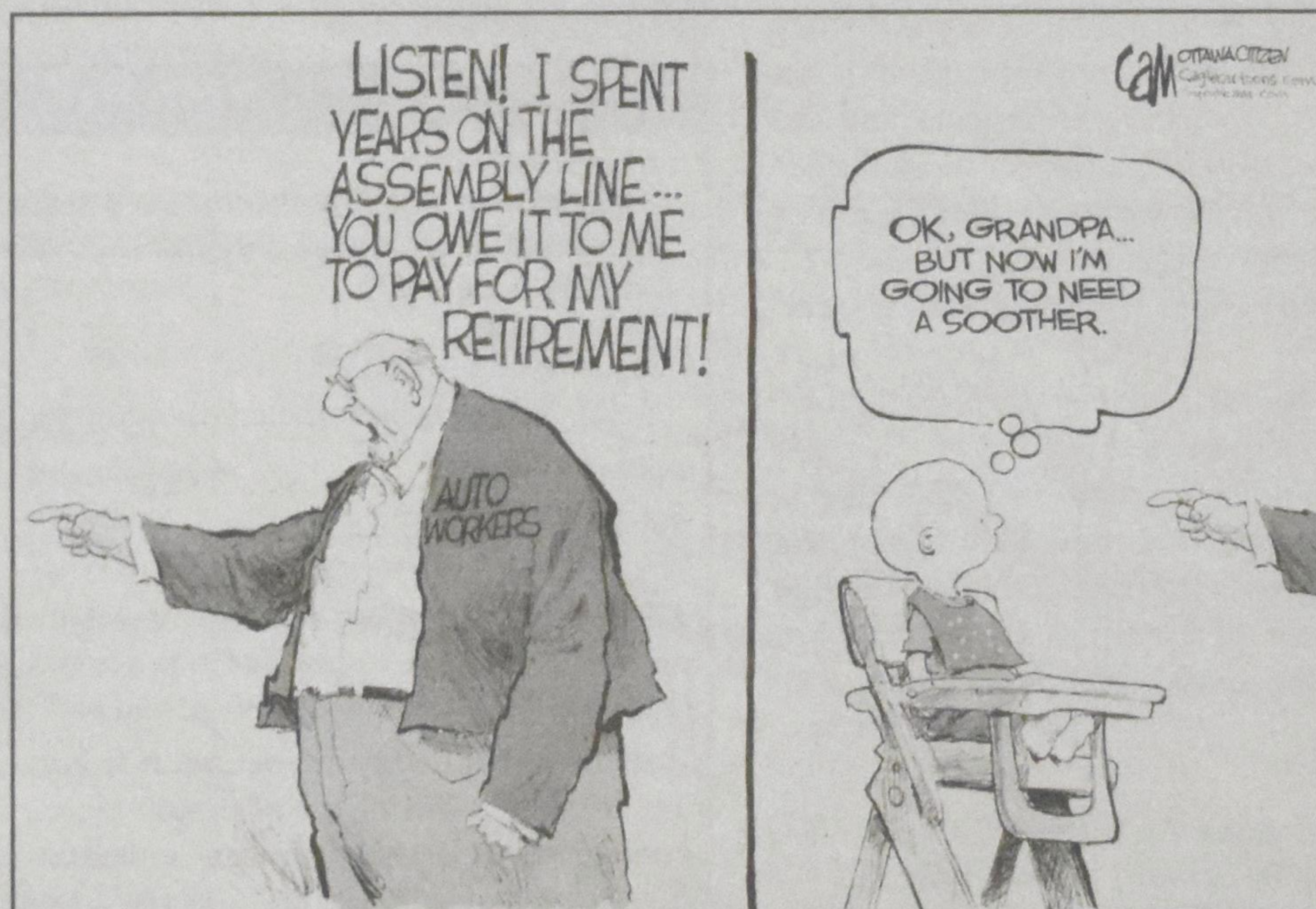
First, the word retirement is not in the Bible in the sense it is used today. When the word "retired" occurs in Judges 20:39, it means "back off" or "come rest from the battle." A Calvin Seminary prof, the late Dr. Louis Praamsma, found no theological basis for retirement. He said "I will not be going to Florida and spend a lot of time there doing nothing. I do not think this is right."

Having served three CRC churches in Florida, we have some perspective on how Christians retire. On one side of the spectrum, many people, like our parents, worked until they could not work anymore, well into their 70s. Then they would come a month to Florida to enjoy a break from the North. We did not, nor do we think God would, begrudge these pioneers a while in the sun. But on the other side of the spectrum, there are some who did well in the business world and

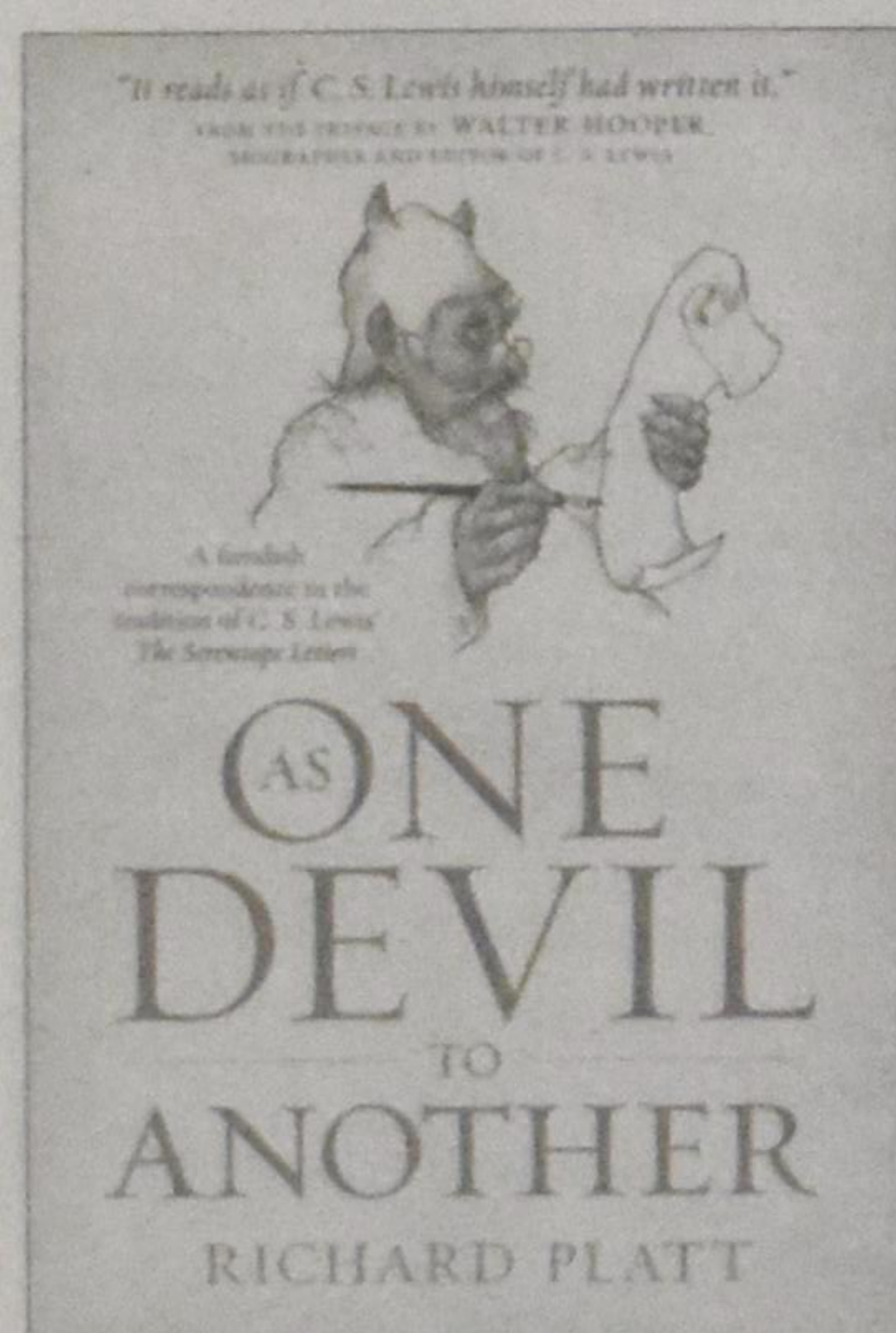
have that entitlement attitude, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on luxury items and travel. Now these same people may well have put God and the Kingdom first. And they may well have given and are still giving and working with all kinds of Christian ministries. God looks at the heart. So we have to be discerning and careful. But usually these folk are self-absorbed, self-serving and materialistic. How can one justify this with God and his holy word? "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?" (Matt. 16:20).

By this time you are wondering what we are doing in Florida. By grace, the Lord called us to the Sea Port of Palm Beach, Florida, to pioneer a Christ-centered mission to seafarers. We also were led to start a small satellite mission in Freeport, Bahamas, where there was also no mission, no cross, no Gospel. The harvest is indeed enormous. We desperately need your prayers and help.

Mrs. Jean and Rev. John Van Hemert
Lantana, Florida



Reviews

**As One Devil to Another**

by Richard Platt

Tyndale House Publishers
2012, 192 p.

Armor up! As One Devil to Another

Angela Reitsma Bick

"A Missions Professor who had served in Central America," Rev. Mary Hulst says, "told us seminary students stories about spiritual warfare that would make our hair stand on end. After class, we'd say, 'I'm so glad all the demons are over there in Central America! Because that is some scary business.'"

Except for the odd sermon on Ephesians 6, we don't discuss spiritual warfare frequently in the Christian Reformed church. We rightly emphasize that Christ has already won the war (2 Cor. 10:4) but tend to avoid describing the Christian life as being on the front lines of battle. "And that," Hulst warns in a sermon called *Armor Up!*, "is just what Satan wants us to do."

That battle is brought into sharp relief in a new book, a modern retake of the classic *Screwtop Letters* by C.S. Lewis. In *As One Devil to Another*, Richard Platt imagi-

nes – like Lewis – the correspondence that might pass between a senior devil to his protégé as the latter tries to direct a "patient" through Hell's gates.

On the one hand, *The Screwtop Letters*, though 70 years old, remains as relevant as ever. Pride and other human weaknesses haven't changed. The modern reader will still squirm at this passage: "It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turning, without milestones, without signposts" (65). Lewis' razor-sharp observations of human nature do not need updating.

Deliver us from evil

On the other hand, it's possible that demonic strategies evolve. In that case, Platt's book is a useful tool for awakening Christians to the particular dangers of today's world. A deck of cards no longer signifies a debauched lifestyle; instead, computers might risk our spiritual health in ways we haven't considered. "The Internet can teach too," senior devil Slashreap writes ominously, "and we shall be the instructors. . . . With this gift from His Infernal Majesty, we have been blessed with the nanosecond attention span, the erosion of patience, the exponential growth of credulity and gullibility, the silent proliferation of pornography and . . . greater access to children" (123).

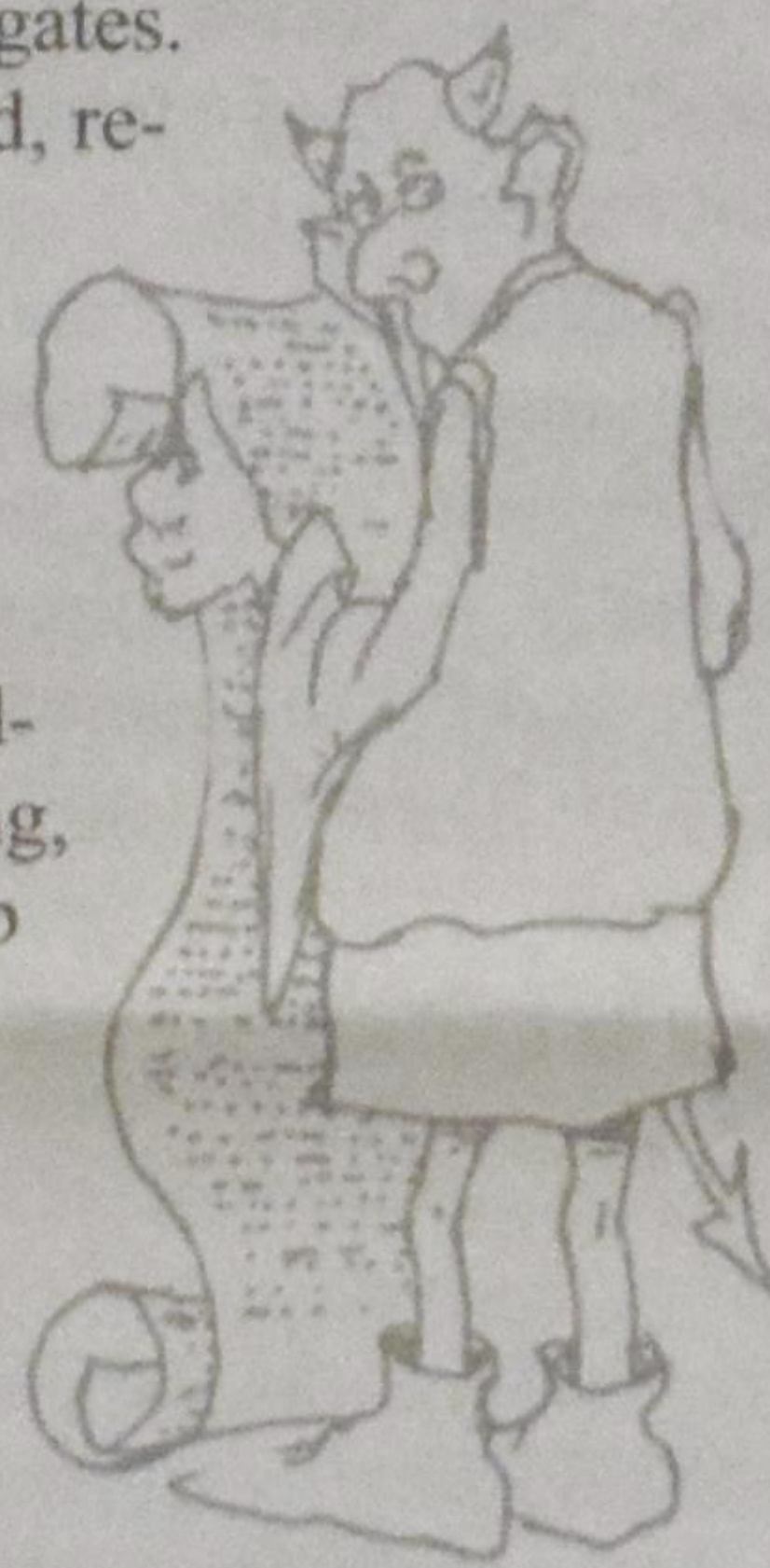
Slashreap is proud of many demonic offensives in our age: helping create the nuclear bomb, making cancer more aggressive, spreading political correctness and encouraging "inner fortresses of vanity that will eventually be soul-entombing." His protégé's patient is a young woman in university, where Slashreap brags that devilish influences have split the humanities from the sciences. As a result of this divide, he says gleefully, ethicists and philosophers have lost the chance to discuss "Should we do this?" with scientists, who have become obsessed instead with "Can we do this?"

For thine is the kingdom

Platt's narrative voice is close to Lewis's own, with – thankfully – similar moments of relief for the reader. The book is not a litany of demonic victories. Slashreap is forced to share information with his protégé about God, "the Adversary," even though this makes his stomach turn. "The Adversary prizes these worthless creatures," he complains; whether the humans "mindlessly obey, [follow] intellectual pathways, return through Grace, or come resisting to the last – all are welcomed. It is all so unfair!" he whines (87). Slashreap even wonders what a society designed by God would look like without devilish intervention: there would be a great deal more prayer and worship, he imagines. Every man would do useful work and every man would want the good of the other (46). Furthermore, "there would be neither Rich nor Poor. . . . Each man would look at everything he owns, knowing it all for Gift, and ask himself, 'Do I really use this? . . . Do I have more to give?' They would soon find that they all have more to give" (48).

As One Devil to Another is a worthy descendant of *The Screwtop Letters*, another tool to remind us that all the demons aren't over there in Central America. It's easy to "unwittingly give Satan an opening for yet more mischief," as Paul writes in 2 Cor. 2:10 (*The Message*). Let's not be "oblivious to his sly ways." >

Angela Reitsma Bick (Editor of Christian Courier) is a member of First CRC in Barrie and part of a small group currently studying *The Screwtop Letters*.



Les Mis breaks down barricades at the box office

Brett Alan Dewing

Les Misérables, the long-running Broadway hit, is now an award-nominated movie. How does it compare?

Much was made of Oscar-winning director Tom Hooper's decision to record all of the singing live. While the strategy surely breathes fresh life into the performances, it still manages to sound like a big-budget musical, but one that allows its actors to breathe, literally and artistically, while showing their imperfections along with their moments of brilliance.

Hugh Jackman perhaps loses the most in the translation, his classic, smooth voice ravaged by the character he plays. He makes a compelling Valjean, and while this is every bit his story, the film acts more as a study of the people that are drawn to and flung from his orbit as he lives out the second half of his life. And they are intriguing people, one and all, each given short span to shine and spin on as the story marches forward.

Among them is Anne Hathaway's much-celebrated turn as Fantine, the tragic mother of Valjean's ward, Cosette. Hathaway makes a lot of her short time on screen, showing the broadest character arc outside of Jackman's Valjean. In so short a span, she goes from health to despondence to bottom to death, and it's a credit that she can make the quick fall of Fantine's fortunes resonate like it does.

Russell Crowe plays the cop to Valjean's "robber," Javert. In my opinion, Javert is one of the best characters in the Broadway songbook, and his "Stars" is arguably my favourite song from that book. My biggest worry going into the film was if Crowe, who has sung in a rock band for decades, could pull off my favourite character. The answer is . . . mostly. He sings well, but his singing lacks the fury Javert requires to deepen him beyond a foil. Crowe certainly looks good in the part, and his acting is as good as ever, but that snarl behind the songs is missing, except perhaps in the excellent "Confrontation."

Beyond the barricade

The rest of the cast is rock solid. Helena Bonham Carter and Sacha Baron Cohen connive brilliantly as the Thenardiers, and the film makes effective, frugal use of the comic pair. Samantha Barks shines as a less miserable Eponine than expected, full of life and light despite her awful family. Amanda Seyfried is a surprisingly good Cosette, though she can be a little thin in the character's high register. Most surprisingly, Eddie Redmayne's freckled, pretty boy face belies a manly, well-sung Marius. The ensemble together make a perfect impression, living and dying in their turns. Thankfully, we are spared the full force of Gavroche's urchin theme song, "Little People," and the character gains much-needed likability thereby.

The 2-hour, 45 minute runtime means such cuts are necessary, and they are mostly chosen wisely. The film relies too much on recitative, however, and the blurring melodies that can bring. When each song is reached, it is done justice, but we often have to wait too long between them. As a result, the plot is more spelled out than when I first saw it on Broadway. Even still, I am yet a little muddy on what the Student Revolt was all about after all.

The great benefit the film has over the play, of course, is budget and scope. It can narrow in on the face of a singer or widen to embrace the rotting surroundings. The squalor and luxury of the time are well-presented – the former obviously more so – by the intense attention to detail by the design crew and director.

While much will be made of the technical elements of the film and the emotional impact it carries, what many reviewers will miss is the profound story of faith and forgiveness Victor Hugo set out for us. Valjean, as our hero, is constantly faced with moral questions in which he must do the right thing over the easy thing, the loving thing over the fair thing. And he does it all out of a solid faith in God, kindled by a lonely bishop (played, in a coup of stunt casting, by Colm Wilkinson) who chose to quite literally redeem his life from the pit with silver, claiming it for God. In this upside-down Judas scenario, a life is changed, created, that will touch many more for good in the midst of misery. And what better Christian message is there than that? >

Brett Alan Dewing is a poet, playwright and critic. He reviews films at b-a-dreviews.blogspot.com and blogs at undergroundrainbow.blogspot.com.



The film makes effective, frugal use of this comic pair.



News

Quebec: Bishops slam court decision forcing private school to teach 'neutral' religion/morality class

MONTREAL (LifeSiteNews) — Quebec's Catholic bishops have taken issue with a court decision that would force a Montreal private Catholic high school to cease teaching its Catholic course on religion and morality and switch to the "secular" and "neutral" Ethics and Religious Culture course (ERC) provided by the provincial government.

The Quebec Court of Appeal overturned a lower court which had ruled that any attempt to force Loyola High School to teach the strictly secular religion and morality course would be a violation of their freedom of religion under the Quebec Charter of Rights.

The December 4 ruling instead upheld the initial 2008 ruling of the province's education minister who, at that time, forbade the Jesuit-run Loyola High School from covering the mandatory curriculum by means of an already developed equivalent course, but from a Catholic perspective.

The Court of Appeal ruled that "exposing students to the global study of religions in a neutral perspective without requiring them to adhere to it, is not an infringement of freedom of religion." But the bishops pointed out that the ruling would require the Catholic-run school to put the "confessional nature" of its educational approach in "brackets" every time the ERC course was taught.

Instead of forcing "disintegration" on its citizens, the bishops would like to see the government make efforts to accept and respect religious differences. "For our part,

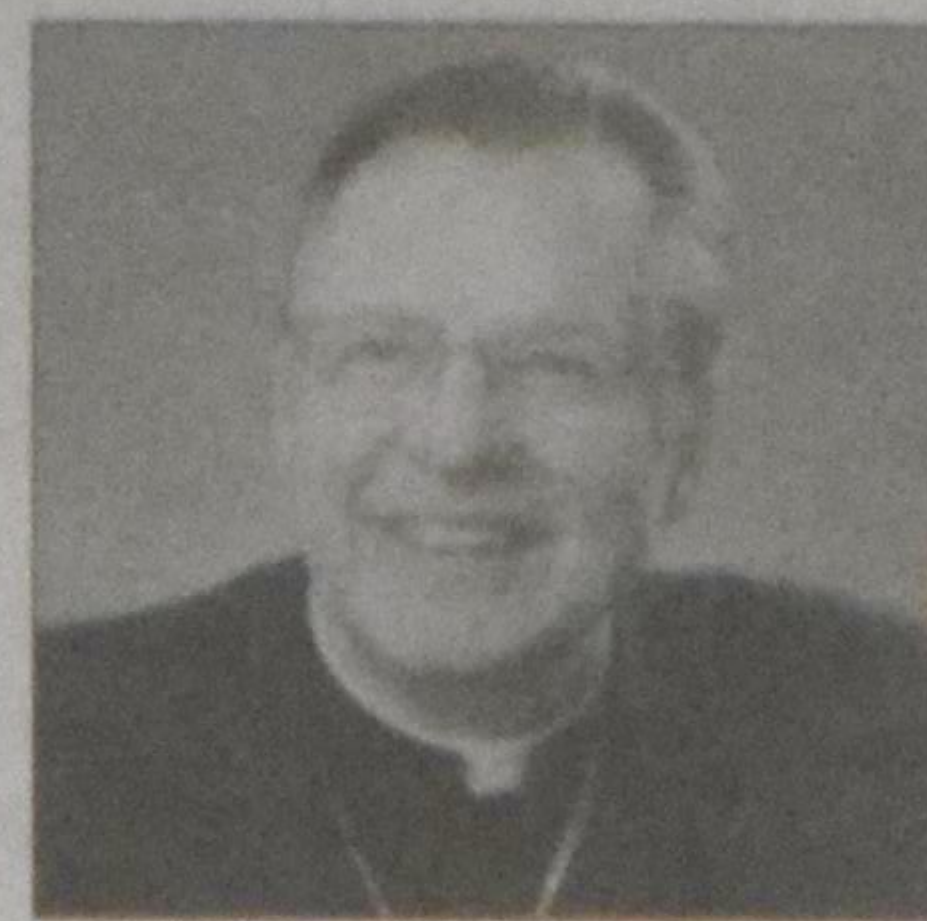
we believe that the minister could have used [ministerial] discretion to recognize the value of the approach adopted by Loyola High School in its program," said Archbishop Pierre-André Fournier, president of the Quebec Catholic Bishops' Assembly (AECQ).

'Does not bode well'

The bishops stressed that "everything possible" must be done to make "everyone feel recognized and respected" in their religious differences as well as their religious and conscience rights.

"A society like ours, open to pluralism and to relevant modulations, cannot escape [this task]," they said. Loyola principal Paul Donovan said in a December 14 YouTube video that his school did not go to court "just to get our way" but because the issue involved "society as a whole."

Donovan said that at the heart of the issue is the "ministry saying that as a confessional institution, we are unable to teach the recognition of others — tolerance, understanding — and the pursuit of the common good." He asserted, "From the perspective of the Ministry of Education, of the Quebec government, and affirmed by the Court of



The ruling doesn't respect religious differences, Archbishop Fournier argues.



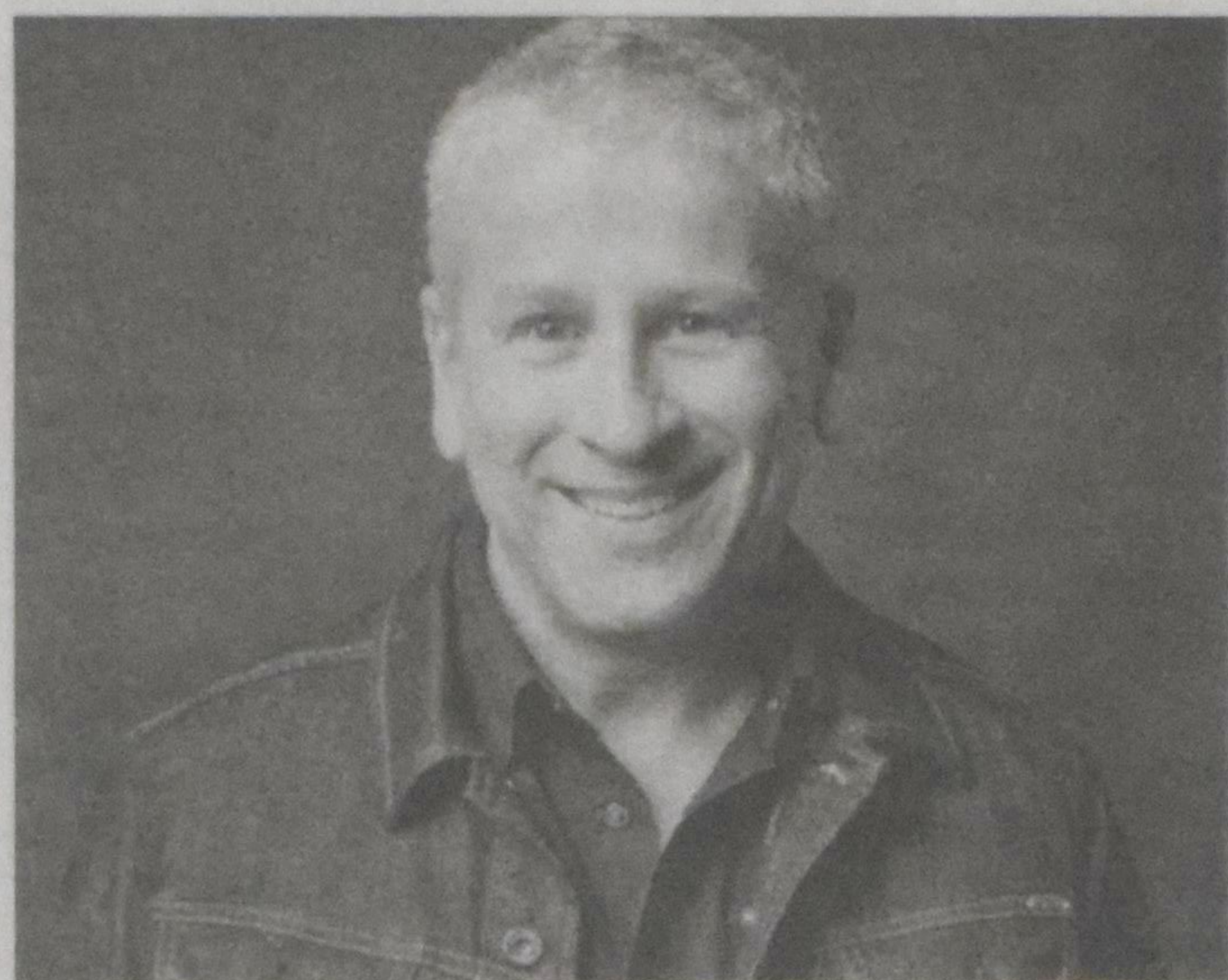
Coming soon: Ethics and Religion from a secular perspective at this Montreal Catholic High School.

Appeals, we can only [teach these things] as secularists, from a secular perspective."

Donovan said that the court decision does not "bode well" for a society that values religious diversity, particularly in terms of the "richness that religions of all types have to offer, and in particular the contribution of Catholicism in schools like Loyola that have contributed so much to our society, and to the well being of society."

Loyola High School has until February 2 to decide whether to appeal the Court of Appeal decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. ➤

Obama inauguration: Pastor with 'wrong' views dis-invited to pray



The skeleton in Rev. Giglio's closet was a 1990s sermon advocating "recovery" for homosexuals.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CCO/AJC) — The invitation to an evangelical pastor from Atlanta to deliver the benediction at U.S. President Barack Obama's second inauguration, Jan. 21, was offered then quickly withdrawn after it was discovered that the pastor's views regarding homosexuality do not line up with Obama's.

On Jan. 8 it was announced that Rev. Louie Giglio, pastor of Passion City Church in Atlanta, had been chosen to give the inaugural benediction. Only days earlier Giglio's church had hosted more than 60,000 people at the Georgia Dome at this year's "Passion Conference," which also featured well-known pastor-speaker-writer John Piper. The conferences were begun by Giglio in 1997, aimed at uniting Christian young people in worship and aiding them in living their faith.

"Giglio was chosen to pray at the inauguration partly because of his leadership in combating human trafficking

around the world," Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC) spokeswoman Addie Whisenant had said. Giglio has raised \$3.3 million for the fight against human trafficking.

The day after Giglio was asked to lead the inaugural benediction, a website called ThinkProgress reported that he had preached a sermon in the 1990s which advocated "recovery" for gays and which compared same-sex attraction to alcoholism. Giglio called the gay rights movement "not benevolent" in advocating that "the homosexual lifestyle becomes accepted as a norm in our society."

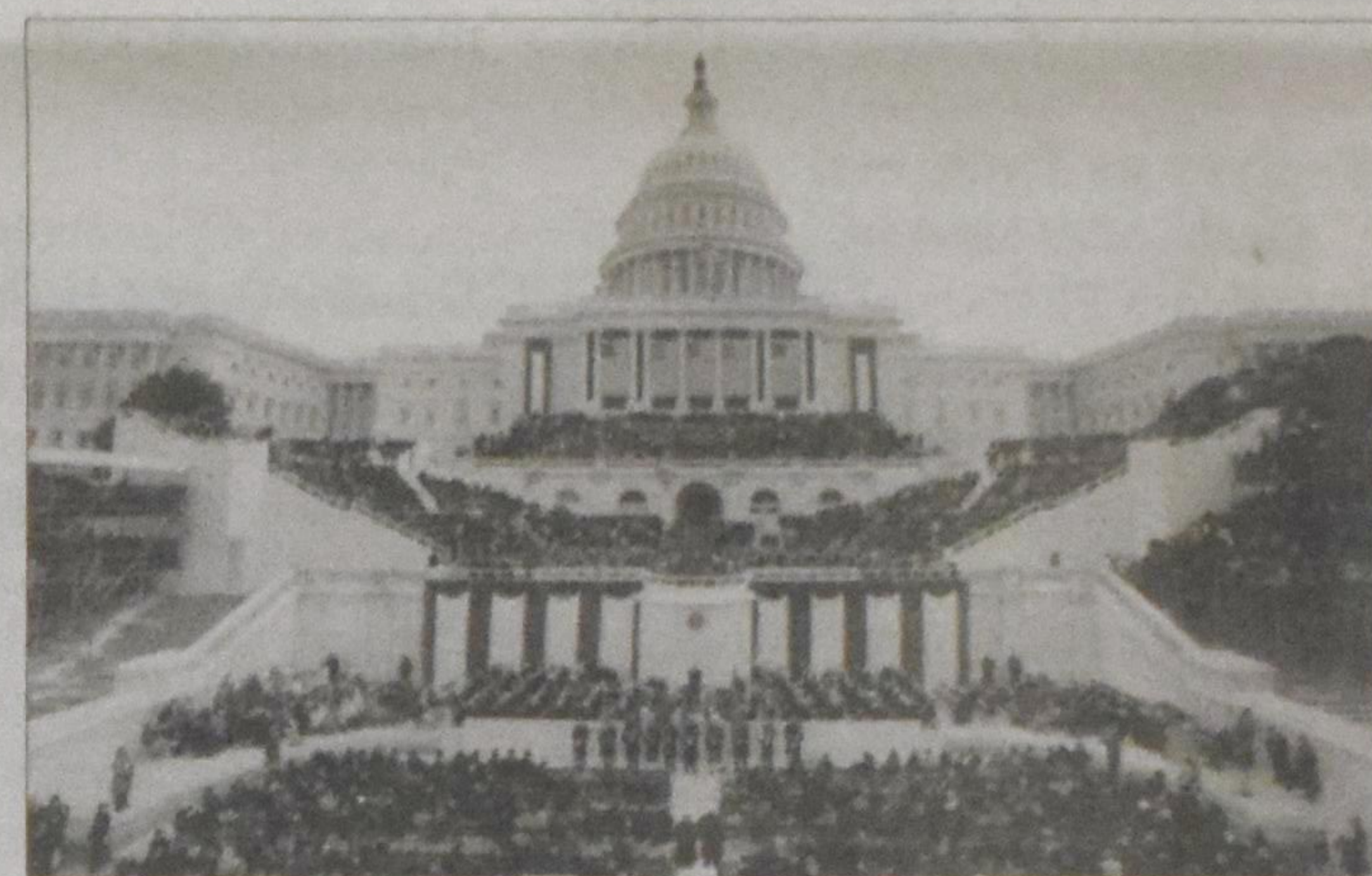
Then, two days after the invitation was issued it was withdrawn. "We were not aware of Pastor Giglio's past comments at the time of his selection and they don't reflect our desire to celebrate the strength and diversity of our country at this Inaugural," the PIC said in a statement. "Pastor Giglio was asked to deliver the benediction in large part for his leadership in combating human trafficking around the world. As we now work to select someone to deliver the benediction, we will ensure their beliefs reflect this administration's vision of inclusion and acceptance for all Americans."

Who is intolerant?

That same day, directly addressing his congregation on his church's blog, Giglio wrote, "The issue of homosexuality (which a particular message of mine some 20 years ago addressed) is one of the most difficult our nation will navigate. However, individuals' rights of freedom, and the collective right to hold differing views on any subject, is a critical balance we, as a people, must recover and preserve.

As a pastor, my mission is to love people, and lead them well, while lifting up the name of Jesus above anything else. I'm confident that anyone who knows me or has listened to the multitude of messages I have given in the last decade would most likely conclude that I am not easily characterized as being opposed to people — any people."

One day later, the PIC announced that Giglio had been



The Inaugural benediction must line up with the administration's "vision," reps said.

replaced by Richard Blanco, the first "LGBT [lesbian/gay/bisexual/transvestite] person to recite a poem at the swearing-in ceremony." The committee had previously announced that the Lesbian and Gay Band Association will take part in the inaugural parade.

While gay activists applauded Giglio's removal, many others did not. Ruth Malhotra, 28, of Atlanta, who has known Giglio for 14 years and is actively involved in the Passion movement, said the pastor has an "uncompromising commitment to biblical truth," which is now being attacked. "The message sent by homosexual activists who opposed Giglio's participation in President Obama's inauguration is clear: Unless you embrace, applaud and advocate for the homosexual lifestyle and same-sex marriage, your views, your voice and even your work on behalf of the poor and suffering are not welcome in the public square," said Malhotra.

Tony Perkins, president of the Washington-based Family Research Council, responded, "Catholic, Evangelical Protestant and Orthodox churches all actively proclaim that sexual intimacy within the marriage of one man and one woman is the only biblically sanctioned human sexual behaviour. Are the scores of millions of Americans who affirm these teachings no longer welcome at the inauguration of our President?" ➤

News

New study challenges UN health priorities, statistics

LONDON (CWN) – A new study published in *The Lancet* shows that common diseases such as diarrhea cause millions of needless deaths worldwide each year, while UN health officials devote more attention to less urgent issues such as access to abortion.

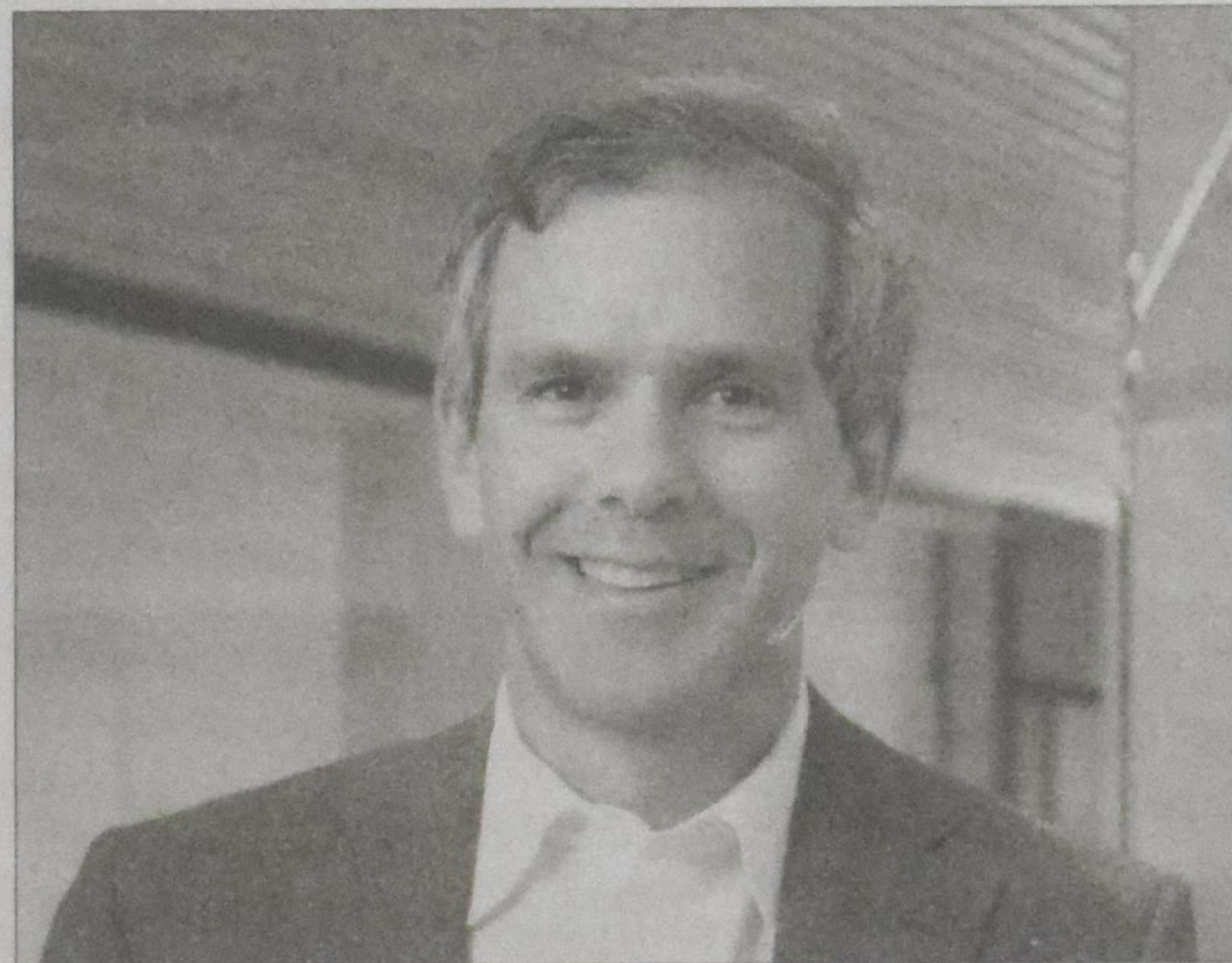
The 2010 Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Study found that 1.4 million people died that year from diarrhea, with the condition proving especially deadly among children. Despite a 41.9 percent drop from 1990 levels, diarrhea remains a leading cause of death, particularly for children.

Yet diarrhea does not receive the same attention by the UN as more politically correct issues such as deaths from abortion. The GBD 2010 reported 37,100 deaths from abortion complications (2.65 percent of the figure for diarrhea), yet advocacy groups promoting access to “safe” abortion are prominent and influential within the UN system and have gained traction by linking abortion to maternal mortality.

Abortion advocates attempted to prevent *The Lancet* from publishing a previous report by GBD author Dr. Christopher Murray which revealed that the World Health Organization (WHO) was reporting nearly twice the number of actual global maternal deaths. That maternal health report had important implications for many United Nations initiatives that relied on the erroneous numbers, as well as the case for their continued funding. The new GBD 2010 reports a further reduction in maternal mortality to 254,700 deaths per year – not a trivial number, but more than five times fewer than those killed by diarrhea.



There is no reason why a child should die from diarrhea, study says.



Dr. Murray is among researchers who reveal that WHO data is biased.

Political agenda

Murray, who worked at WHO before starting the GBD project, has taken issue with other statistics generated by his former employer: he and his colleagues reported that malaria caused 1.24 million deaths in 2010, many of them children. This is twice the WHO estimate for the same year. According to a UN source, Dr. Murray became *persona non grata* within some parts of the UN system when he left the WHO to form a competitor organization aimed at challenging WHO data and UN health policy priorities.

GBD 2010 was conducted by independent researchers rather than researchers connected to a policymaking institution. Introducing the study, *Lancet* editor Richard Horton pointed out “the success of the GBD, then and now is that it provides a level playing field to assess independently (and dispassionately) the health priorities that face countries.”

The Global Burden of Disease Study also found that while drugs have proven effective in arresting the development of AIDS, the overall fight against AIDS remains jeopardized by risky sexual behaviours. Only five percent of the funds allocating to AIDS prevention has been devoted to efforts to change behaviours. ➤

Pope's Twitter success praised as evangelization breakthrough



VATICAN CITY (CNA/EWTN News) – Pope Benedict's mass of 2.5 million followers in eight languages during his first month on the online social media site Twitter has one Vatican priest calling the pontiff's online presence “a new frontier” of evangelization. Twitter is a social media service that allows users to send out 140-character messages called “tweets,” to other users who follow their accounts. Followers and others may then share these tweets with their own followers with a “re-tweet.”

Father Paolo Padriani, a collaborator of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, says it is good that the Pope has so many followers, but is even more important that he “seeks to co-exist and share on Twitter.” Padriani told CNA, “Being present in social media is evangelizing, if just for the fact that he is present with his words. It's a great joy to see the Pope's words being disseminated, a joy that is held by all believers.” Nevertheless, not all who have responded to the Pope's tweets have been positive. While many replies have been devout, appreciative and inquisi-

tive, others have been flippant, irreverent and even obscene.

Since Benedict's first tweet on Dec. 12 he has shared his favourite memory of Christmas, asked for prayers for an end to the Syrian conflict and exhorted others to look to Jesus Christ. “Following Christ's example, we have to learn to give ourselves completely,” the Pope said on Twitter Jan. 9. “Anything else is not enough.”

Fr. Padriani, who developed and implemented pontifical council communications initiatives like the website pope2you.net and the iPhone app iBreviary, said that he thinks the Pope's success on Twitter is “major.” “It has really warmed my heart. It's a beautiful thing. But I didn't have



The Pope, through his words, has brought joy to believers.

UK study: Being 'spiritual but not religious' leaves openings for mental illness, drug use, eating disorders

Marian Van Til, with files from BJP, DUC

LONDON – A study published in the January issue of the *British Journal of Psychiatry* says that persons who are “spiritual but not religious” are more likely to develop a “mental disorder,” “be dependent on drugs” and “have abnormal eating attitudes” like bulimia and anorexia.

“People who have spiritual beliefs outside of the context of any organized religion are more likely to suffer from these maladies,” says Michael King, a professor at University College London and the study's head researcher.

Thirty percent of respondents who identified as “spiritual” said they had used drugs. However, only about half that number (16 percent) of respondents who identified themselves as “religious” and said they had used drugs. Among the “spiritual” respondents, five percent admitted drugs-dependency, while only two percent of “religious” respondents said they are drug-dependent.

Regarding mental health, the study says that “spiritual but not religious” people are also more likely to suffer from “any neurotic disorder,” “mixed anxiety/depressive disorders” or “depression” than are those who self-identify as “religious.” Four percent more “spiritual” respondents than “religious” respondents said they suffered from a neurotic disorder (19 percent to 15 percent). Overall, “People who have a spiritual understanding of life in the absence of a religious framework are vulnerable to mental disorder,” the study concluded.

‘Quite obvious differences’

The study noted that being “spiritual but not religious” may describe people who do not attend church, atheists who believe in some sort of higher power, free thinkers and the unaffiliated. It is also used for people who blend different faiths, wrote Michael King.

King says he has already received “a substantial amount of hate mail” over the study, but defended his findings. “If you take drug dependency, they are about 77 percent more likely than religious respondents, 24 percent more likely to having a generalized anxiety disorder. These are quite obvious differences.”

The study was conducted in conjunction with the the British government, and the questions were part of a larger psychiatric study. A sample of 7,403 Britons was used. Nearly 19 percent of them identify as “spiritual but not religious.”

Several similar academic studies in the U.S. have revealed similar conclusions. Tanya Luhrmann, a psychological anthropologist at California's Stanford University, says that most research about “religion and well-being” has found that “religion is good for you.” ➤

any doubt in my mind that it would be successful,” he said.

Padriani is optimistic about Twitter as a medium, even though little can be said in a single tweet. “One hundred and forty characters are few but the number of years of Jesus on earth were also few,” he said. “The important thing is to be present and to do so with quality.” Fr. Padriani added that the Pope has helped inspire others on the internet. “I feel that because of the Pope's presence online, all of the work of all of us who work in evangelization online is also valued.” ➤

Features

Family Retreat offers unconditional acceptance

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Last year, from August 25 – 31, my husband Rinke and I had the privilege of volunteering as short term missionaries (STMs) at Family Retreat held at Elim Lodge, Peterborough, Ont. The week of exciting events, new friendships and eye-opening challenges was hosted by Christian Horizons, an organization that “empowers individuals with exceptional needs, enabling them to embrace their God-given potential and enjoy hope and opportunity in everyday living” (christian-horizons.org), in partnership with Joni and Friends International (joniandfriends.org).

Recently, I interviewed David Petkau, Christian Horizons’ Director of Ontario Operations. He oversees the organization’s Vacations Ministries that includes Family Retreats. According to Petkau, each year Christian Horizons provides more than 600 vacations to people with exceptional needs.

What is Family Retreat? How did Joni and Friends International become involved?

Our Family Retreat started in 2011. Christian Horizons and Joni and Friends International have had a partnership for a number of years serving in other countries. Family Retreat 2011 was our first partner retreat that sought to reach out to families who are affected by exceptional needs. The retreats are designed to be a place where families can enjoy a vacation experience together and where the barriers associated with their exceptional need (often the care of a child or children with disabilities) are broken down and have been overcome. This not only includes physical barriers, but attitudinal ones, as well. Families enjoy unconditional love and acceptance, are free to be themselves, and are assisted by key STMs during the week. The STMs are assigned one to one and are an important part of allowing a family to enjoy time together, along with allowing the mom and dad to enjoy time alone.

Joni and Friends were key in sharing the model of retreat that they use around the world, and inspired planning strategies and themes. They also provided some seed funding for the first two years that was dedicated to sponsor families to be able to attend.

What activities are provided?

Activities included tubing (behind a motor boat), boat rides, a square dance, motorcycle sidecar rides, spa treatments for the ladies, exotic petting zoo, talent night and a

date night for the parents and caregivers which included a dinner out alone, and more.

How are the parents encouraged in their Christian faith and life journey?

The retreat offers many ways that people are encouraged in their faith. At Family Retreat 2012, Dr. Bill McRae, the keynote speaker, brought encouragement and challenges from God’s Word to retreat participants. A session on “soul care,” was provided as well as daily chapel and devotional times. But there was probably no better encouragement to the parents and families than the encouragement brought about by fellowshipping together and building relationships.

What impact has Family Retreat had on families?

Families share many things with us during and after the retreat. Common themes are that the support and unconditional acceptance of their family are key to them being able to enjoy time together. Families have told us that their stress is alleviated by the dedication of the STMs. They know that their child is accepted, safe, engaged in fun activities and meeting new people. One family stated that the support given to them by their STM allowed them to go on the date night, the first time they’d been out as a couple in more than eight years. Families have also shared how they have been able to grow in relationships and friendship with other families who attended the retreat and that these friendships transcend the week of the retreat.

What about the impact on volunteers?

Volunteers have both a significant impact on the families and are impacted by the retreat themselves. Many of our volunteers come with a limited exposure to the challenges that families face when dealing with a loved one with a disability. With the training they are provided and the hands-on experience, they come to a whole new level of understanding and compassion. Here, too, we have seen relationships and friendships grow between families and volunteers.

What challenges has Christian Horizons faced when organizing this event?

The event relies heavily on volunteers, so that can be a challenge. For Family Retreat 2012, we were blessed to have our needs met, but are constantly mindful of the



The family that volunteers together stays together.

challenge and growing need we have for volunteers. Family Retreat experienced massive growth between 2011 and 2012. Our 2012 retreat served just less than three times the families that the 2011 retreat did. We anticipate the need for planning volunteers, STMs, and program volunteers to continue to grow for our 2013 event.

What’s been rewarding?

Most rewarding is seeing God provide for the needs. He has brought volunteers from across Canada and the United States to serve with us. It has also been rewarding to see the impact on families, to see the joy they experience as they are encouraged in spirit, refreshed as a family and have the burdens of everyday life alleviated for this week of rest.

What plans are in place for this year?

Christian Horizons is planning to hold a Family Retreat at Elim Lodge again in August 2013. We are actively considering and exploring the possibilities of a second week as well. Christian Horizons is also discussing our experience with others across Canada to see how we can help resource their community of faith to host a Family Retreat. Family Retreat 2013 information will be posted on our website for families that are interested, as well as for volunteers.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



Unencumbered Vessels

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Once, as I prepared to perform a drama, I asked one of the other participants to pray for me. He replied, “I will pray that we will be unencumbered vessels through whom the Holy Spirit will be able to speak his unhindered message.”

His beautiful words have remained with me since. How I long to be an “unencumbered vessel” as I worship God and serve him! No fear, no selfish motives, no pretense, no hidden agenda, no sin would hamper my pure praise and sacrificial service. For now, of course, my praise isn’t perfect and my service isn’t supremely excellent. Often, I am a heavily encumbered vessel, instead of the opposite.

However, I have role models to teach me how to

be unencumbered. I meet them weekly at my church’s Friendship Club, a ministry to people with physical and mental challenges.

My special friend, Roger, teaches me to be unencumbered by looking to the future. Wheelchair-bound, Roger proudly shows off his Elvis Presley key, claps his hands to the joyful music, sings when he can and anticipates a cup of coffee and a cookie at snack time. Take one look at him and you’d think he was an encumbered vessel. But then he professes his faith and speaks God’s truth to me as he leans over his wheelchair armrest and states enthusiastically, “When I die, I’m going to heaven!”

“I am, too!” I answer.

As I recall that conversation, I think, oh, Roger, you may look encumbered to those whose eyes are blind to God’s ways. But, by God’s grace, I hear God’s unhindered message in your words, I see God’s unhampered strength displayed in your weakness, and I acknowledge

God’s unobstructed majesty in your hopeful spirit.

Roger is just one of the friends who teach me to be unencumbered. There are others, too. Lisa, a young woman with Down syndrome, who musses up my hair and hugs me firmly around the waist, helps my laughter, hugs and smiles flow freely. Shane, who loves to be on stage and sing God’s praises, teaches me total abandon in worship. Sherri, who loves snack time and knows all the upcoming dates when special food will be served at Friendship Club, shows me how to anticipate “the wedding supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19: 9b).

I go home enriched after being in the presence of my friends. From them, I am learning to be unencumbered – to hope for the new heaven and earth, to show my love for others, to place wealth, status and success where they belong at the foot of the cross and to enjoy and anticipate the feast of life with Christ both now and forevermore.

Features

I am exceptional

Rod Hugen

An acquaintance walked up, punched me on the shoulder and jovially called out, "How's it going, big guy?" In that moment I was reminded again that I am exceptional. I am six feet eight inches tall and weigh 325 pounds, so I am mostly known for my exceptional size. Whatever other attributes, skills or abilities I might possess, they all pale in comparison to my size. Because I am such a large man, this acquaintance assumed that he could punch me. He assumed that I don't experience pain in the normal way that others do. He hit me much, much harder than he would have had I been a smaller person, because he assumed that my giant body somehow makes me impervious to pain. It's a scenario that has played out often in my life.

What he didn't know was that I was awaiting surgery at the time to deal with severe discomfort in my shoulder. The lightest tap produced excruciating pain. I wanted to retaliate, to rage against him, but then I remembered the other thing that giants are supposed to be – gentle. Gentle giants are supposed to just grin and bear it. When we see people who are exceptional, we often make assumptions about them; assumptions that may have no basis in reality and that can damage relationship and cause unnecessary suffering.

To paraphrase Will Rogers, we are all exceptional, just in different ways. Some of our exceptionality is visible and some is hidden. We love to categorize people, to place them in boxes. We are often sure we are right and assume things about them regardless of evidence. There are tall people and short people. There are people who can figure out how to get us to Mars and there are people who have a hard time figuring out how to get to the store down the street. There are people who are confident and people who are fearful. There are those of us who fit into what we like to call "normal" categories and then there are outliers who don't fit into "normal." Yet each of us, even the most "average," is exceptional in our own way.

My sister Ruth, who suffers from cerebral palsy, walks with a severe limp and is unsteady on her feet. She lives in constant pain because of the spastic nature of her muscles and because of the numerous corrective surgeries she had as a child. I am always amazed at the grace she exhibits in her suffering. She has a specially-trained service dog who makes her life much easier. The dog can brace himself to support her weight. He can fetch things for her and get help should she fall. But my sister regularly runs into people who don't believe she truly needs the dog. Perhaps out of fear or ignorance, people try to have her and her dog removed from stores, restaurants and other public places. There are those who don't think she should have the preferred parking spot in front of the store and who ignore the laws that set aside those parking spots for people like her. In conversations and confrontations with them, she has been told that she is just taking up space and not worth having around. She has been subjected to every form of vulgar expletive. People can be very mean to those they deem exceptional and "privileged." Sometimes I wonder what they would think if they had to spend just one night in the pain she lives daily. People who are exceptional often live pain-filled lives.

My son is godparent to a seven-year old girl who was born missing part of her brain. Her mother refused the option of abortion and now faces the reality of raising a severely-challenged daughter. My son takes this little girl into his heart and home each weekend to offer respite care



Jolie, the "I love you" girl (above). Ruth and her service dog, Rossie (right).

to her mother. It is a delight for our family to have her and her sister in our lives. We call her the "I love you" girl because of a little game she plays with us where she says, "I, I, I . . ." until one of us says, "love . . ." and then she responds with a devastatingly beautiful smile, claps her hands loudly and shouts, "YOU!" She then blows a kiss. The "I love you" girl is a medical miracle, but she will never be able to graduate from school or hold a job. Some of us think she would make a great Walmart greeter since she says a cheerful hi to everyone she meets, but the reality is that she will always need extensive support.

As society's resources become scarcer and life is valued by its economic worth, people like the "I love you" girl are more easily shoved aside. Before she ever made it into this world, doctors wanted to abort her since she was considered "not viable." When closely examined, the words "not viable" can quickly get turned into "not valuable." The medical community assured her mother that this baby would likely not survive her birth and would be on total life support if she did. Rather than dwelling on the sanctity of life, the discussion was always about viability. Few assumed she would reach age seven and rip open presents at our Christmas gathering. We wonder what the future holds for her. It can be terrifying to be exceptional, an outlier. In a society driven by values of cost and benefit, she might be declared unnecessary, a burden.

Of course, there are other kinds of exceptionality as well. There are those who have high intelligence quotients and are forced to deal with the lofty expectations of those in the education world. We pressure the best and the brightest to be best and brightest. We may assume that because one child was precocious, other children in the family will be equally so. My older sister was valedictorian of every class she was ever part of and when I came along there was a good deal of assumption that I would be just like her. I struggled with learning disabilities and ADD and was a poor student. I soon recognized that I was a disappointment, but it took a good while for me to understand the pressure my sister had to deal with as she faced society's expectations of her. High expectations can be as hard to experience as low ones.

The daughter of a friend of mine was given a scholarship to the California Institute of Technology. At a gathering of



parents, my friend was reminded that his daughter, who had been exceptional all through elementary and high school, might suddenly find herself to be "average." He was told that the adjustment would be difficult and that his daughter would have to learn to live with different expectations. Being exceptionally skilled or exceptionally talented or exceptionally bright creates its own hardships.

We often pressure those who show athletic ability to take up sport. We urge those who show aptitude for music to play an instrument. I remember my wife telling me that my extremely tall sons did not love basketball like I did and that I should allow them to pursue other activities. My sons are artists and storytellers and only played basketball because I had insisted they do so. We tend to pigeonhole people and assume that because they have certain attributes or skills that they must spend their life in those pursuits.

There are, of course, benefits to being exceptional. I rather enjoy handing down items from a top shelf to people who might not be able to reach them without a ladder. Well, most days I do. What I do thoroughly enjoy is hearing stories. I love hearing how God shapes each of us and that, despite the slash of sin, our unique identity and our inimitable image-bearing of our Creator is expressed so beautifully and exceptionally in each one of us. It takes time and patience to pursue others, to question each other without assumption, and to hear the stories behind our exceptionality. It takes grace to imagine what life looks like through another's eyes and grace to accept our differences. May we all be filled with such grace.

Rod Hugen is a pastor at The Village and a church planter working for Classis Arizona (CRC).



Features



Christian Courier is pleased to present a six-part series on First Nations topics. Our guest writers are author James C. Schaap and Ph.D student Seth Adema. James Schaap will focus primarily on the CRC's outreach efforts to the Zuni people in Rehoboth, N.M., while Seth Adema, who is studying aboriginal interactions with the Canadian criminal justice system, will focus on Canadian concerns, including residential schools. Each writer will be presenting three articles over the next few months. We encourage our readers to offer feedback either by way of a letter to the editor (editor@christiancourier.ca), comments online at christiancourier.ca or by tweeting us at twitter.com/ChrCourier.

Righteous acts, filthy rags and a mission cemetery

James C. Schaap

The cemetery at Rehoboth, N.M., is hardly a tourist stop, even though thousands of travelers pass it daily, thousands more each summer. Just a few miles east of Gallup, N.M., a city sometimes dubbed "The Indian capital of the world," the village of Rehoboth, a century-old CRC mission station, sits quietly just off legendary Route 66 and its hurried descendent, I-40. Beneath the hogbacks a mile south rests the town's century-old cemetery.

The old Rehoboth hospital is long gone, but the oldest stories that rise from the cemetery out back are connected to the hospital that stood for years on the north end of the mission. No medical facility was available to the Navajos and Zunis 110 years ago; medical care was provided, as it had been for centuries, only by tribal medicine men.

Rehoboth Mission, like all white mission endeavours, was an undeniable threat to the Native cultures of the Navajo and Zuni. Mission-supplied health care and education likely perpetuated the most significant changes in the indigenous folks who showed up at the mission's doorstep. Bringing a sick child to a white hospital was conceding the limits of traditional culture.

The story of the Rehoboth hospital, of the boarding school and entire outreach of the mission itself may well be best told by an early morning walk in the old graveyard out back. That cemetery will never be a tourist stop, but for white Christians especially – maybe it should be.

Most people where I live would say the place is not well-kept. Adornments festoon the burial sites: a miniature basketball and hoop, a guitar, half-empty bottles of Coke, dozens of stuffed animals. In a straight line running north and south, you'll find a list of Dutch names: the Reverend L.P. Brink, Rolf Veenstra, Casey Kuipers and his wife Martha. A number of Code Talkers are buried here, World War II heroes, distinguished warriors from the Navajo nation.

On the slope at the eastern edge, rows of white crosses stand, fatigued as war-weary sentries, none of them bearing names. In the gravelly New Mexico soil, those lines of weather-beaten, unlettered wooden crosses bear witness not only to the white man's selfishness and greed, his cultural blindness and racism, but also to the heartbreaking tragedy created by all of our own very best intentions. Those white crosses tell a story I have been trying hard to piece together. And it is in no small part my own.

The rug

Once upon a time an old Navajo rug that has been in my possession for years belonged to my grandfather, a CRC preacher who served on what was then called "The Heathen Mission Board." He likely received the rug as a gift for his good service. That Navajo rug has been with me for forty years, but I'm only beginning to understand its character, because I'm only beginning to understand my ancestors' march west to the tune of "manifest destiny," a march that displaced the region's aboriginal inhabitants and decimated their cultures.

In America, Dutch settlements, like the one I was born in and the one I still live in today, exist only in the northern

tier of states because the Calvinists who immigrated in the mid-19th century would have nothing to do with slavery. But running off the "savages" apparently never similarly gouged their consciences – or if it did, they didn't bother to second guess or confess.

The rug that hangs beside me as I write is a relic of my father's side of the family, the Rev. John C. Schaap, born here, in the States, to an immigrant couple who tried to farm in Dakota Territory at the time of the Wounded Knee Massacre. Nothing in my collection of family stories leads me to believe that he was anything less than sincere about his faith, nor that there was ever any disjunction between his walk and his talk. He was pious I'm sure, but not pietistic. Yet, about Native people, about the purpose and mission of Rehoboth itself, it's quite likely that this very good and righteous man, who undoubtedly prayed fervently for Native people – the Indians – his denomination was evangelizing, was quite wrong, almost dead wrong, certainly by today's moral perceptions.

The question that haunts me is how could he be so wrong? – such a God-fearing man? How can any of us be so misguided? – any of us believers?



Rev. John C. Schaap, circa 1903, member of the CRC's Heathen Mission Board.

Indian boarding schools

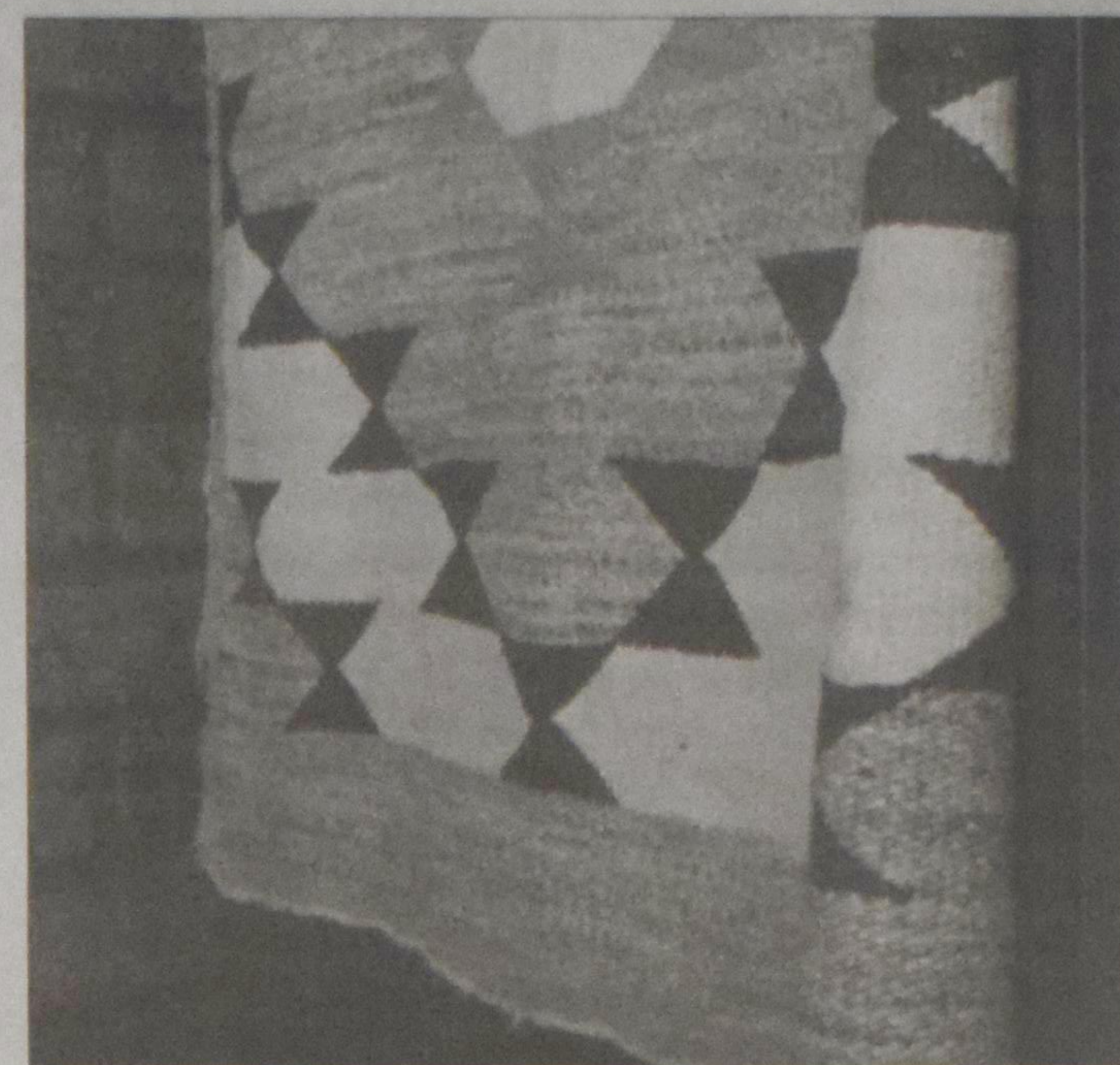
Richard Henry Pratt was the founder, promoter and long-time superintendent of Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Penn., the flagship of the boarding school movement, where indigenous kids went to be educated to deny their Native heritage. Pratt was the movement's draftsman and builder, and his basic argument – actually a liberal position at the time – is often summarized in his own words in a speech in 1892: "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

"Killing the Indian" meant destroying Native culture. Proponents of that basic dogma included some in far higher govern-

mental positions than a military man turned educator like Richard H. Pratt; it included many, many others, people like my grandfather, who clearly bought into it, too.

It is difficult for white folks to understand, but 150 years ago Indian policy in the States was dominated by an abominable either/or argument. Among policy makers and white Native-American advocates, two alternatives existed in determining the future of "the American Indian" – either absorption into American "civilization," or mass extermination. Proponents for the second of those alternatives were many, even in the press and especially those who lived in areas bordering on reservation land. That Native boarding schools were an alternative to mass murder neither excuses nor exonerates Pratt or my grandfather; but the context of the discussion, unimaginable as it may be today, is relevant to my own understanding of how he perceived the mission enterprise.

Sinte Galeksa (Spotted Tail), a Brule (Lakota) chief whose acquaintance with the white man had led him to believe that his people could not profit from more war sent several of his children to Carlisle. But when he traveled to Pennsylvania and found his children homesick and heartless – one in jail – he immediately took them back home to the Dakota Territory.



Disconcerting inheritance.

Graduates of institutions like Carlisle finished their schooling and embarked on futures that were clouded at best – who were they now, and where would they find their homes? In the earliest description of the Rehoboth Mission (1910), Ms. Cocia Hartog opens up those questions. "The future has always been a great problem," she writes in a wonderful little pamphlet titled *Indian Mission Sketches*. "What are these tender lambs to do? Will not all the good impressions in them be wiped out by the overwhelming influence of the old life?" she asks. That question had no satisfying answer at Rehoboth or Carlisle or any of the any Native American boarding school in North America. When they'd return home, Native kids often found themselves outcasts.

Perhaps the most famous story is that of Plenty Horses, a Lakota from Pine Ridge, who spent five years at Carlisle School, then returned home to South Dakota. On January 7, 1891, eight days after Wounded Knee, Plenty Horses shot Lt. Edward Casey through the back of the head, the last white soldier to die in the Sioux Indian Wars.

There was no reason for that death. How did that happen? Anger. Resentment. "I was an outcast," Plenty Horses told people later. "I was no longer an Indian."

Simply stated, the boarding school movement was a white man's means of dealing with the devastation created by white people, who saw North America as empty land, there – and theirs – for the taking.

Good people – good Christian people, my own grandfather among them – were among those who carried out that destruction with the prayerful intentionality that they were doing what the Lord wanted. How faithful believers could be so wrong is the story I'm trying to understand. Not simply *them* either. All of us.

James Calvin Schaap is professor emeritus at Dordt College. He is the author of over twenty books including the recently published *Honest to God, Sixty at Sixty* and *Rehoboth: A Place for Us*. He blogs at siouxlander.blogspot.com.



Columns



Cultivating prayer as a daily life-line to God takes perseverance.

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til



Lord, teach us how to pray aright

God created us so that prayer is essential to our identity as the Redeemed.

It is the golden thread that, intertwined with his written Word, is our life-line to him who created and saved us. Unlike a physical line used in an emergency, the life-line of prayer needs to be grasped every day. "Pray without ceasing," says Paul (1 Thess. 5:17). Then he juxtaposes: "In *everything* give thanks."

If what Paul urges (commands, actually) seems slightly fanatical, consider how and how often you communicate with the person you love most. You revel in contact with your beloved – face-to-face, electronically or on paper. It's an old but apt analogy: if a human being can elicit that response in us, should we not be able to muster such devotion to communicating in prayer with the God we say we dearly love?

Paul's "ceaseless praying" isn't focused on formal prayers, yet effective prayer requires discipline, *is* a discipline. Disciplines are "expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behaviour" says the dictionary. In disciplining ourselves to prayer we train ourselves to rely on, and consult God in, and for, *all* things. And God will change us, often surprisingly, as we "pray continually." Reminding ourselves of the ACTS acronym can help keep our prayer balanced: A: adoration of God; C: confession of sin; T: thanksgiving; S: supplication.

Is it that simple?

Jesus taught his disciples to pray (we'll talk of The Lord's Prayer in an upcoming column or two). He also told them, *Ask, and you shall receive*. Then: "Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). He drives home his point by asking rhetorically, "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (v.9-11). James spells out the simple, inevitable conclusion of *not* taking Jesus' admonition seriously: *You do not have because you do not ask* (James 4:2).

We've heard it since childhood. But life isn't that simple, we protest. We *don't* always get what we ask for from God. Is this spiritual hyperbole aimed to get us to pray when we want to be doing something else? No, we cannot discount Jesus' command and James' blunt observation because of our own short-sighted view of how God works.

If we pray guided by the Spirit (which is the first

thing to ask for), we can know that there is nothing too small in the universe to be outside of God's concern.

If it seems God is ignoring us, or even has it in for us, we need to re-evaluate. Ask, yes! But it is possible to ask for things that God knows will not benefit us (and whose detriment we may not see). Daily immersion in his Word, where he reveals his will for us, will help prevent that.

It takes work

Even when we ask aright, it's so easy to ask a few times and move on, hoping almost superstitiously, that the gift will fall into our laps. Sometimes God does spectacularly answer one-time prayers. If you're literally drowning he may send angels to pluck you from the deep, as he did for people who cried out to him – some for the first time in their lives – during the 2004 tsunami. Still, cultivating prayer as that daily life-line to God takes perseverance. God wants us to rely on him moment by moment, as that child who asks for, then *expects*, bread and fish from her loving father.

God is molding us into the kind of disciples he desires. That nearly always includes refinement in the fires of adversity. It's difficult, sometimes excruciating. But it doesn't negate his love. Whether we actually do emerge as gold with its dross burnt away has much to do with how well we trust him, how often we cry to him, how profoundly we love him and acknowledge him as Lord.

There is a progression of "sanctification" in the Christian life. St. Peter notes qualities, one by one, that God will give us, encompassing "everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." Peter tells us to "make every effort" – *ora et labora*: pray and work! – to acquire those qualities so they accrue to our mustard-seed faith: "Add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love" (1 Peter 1:5-7). The result: we will no longer be "ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

*Lord, teach us how to pray aright,
with reverence and with fear;
though dust and ashes in your sight,
we may, we must draw near.*

*We perish if we cease from prayer,
O grant us power to pray!
And when to meet you we prepare,
Lord, meet us on the way.*

James Montgomery, 1819

Marian Van Til
(mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC
editor living in Youngstown, N.Y.

ARTFUL EYE



2012-12-24

starlings being a scourge
and crows a murder
owls a parliament
strangely
and peacocks
quite rightly
an ostentation
and birds in general
a congregation or dissimulation
you'd think that someone somewhere
would have just the right noun
for grosbeaks

not the waxy, yellow
puffin-aspiring glossy
evening types
that gorge and depart
without a fare-thee-well

but the others
the ones we have ("mine")
the pine type
that gather on roads
to scatter at the approach
of a horror of cars
and sit at the tops of tall poplars
singing for God's sake
and ours
in the middle of winter
during dawn's early glimmer

these pine types
of gentle browns and reds
of beauty muted or startling
these treasures
of the snow season
I say
we should term
a pleasure . . .
a pleasure
of grosbeaks
yes

Curt Gesch

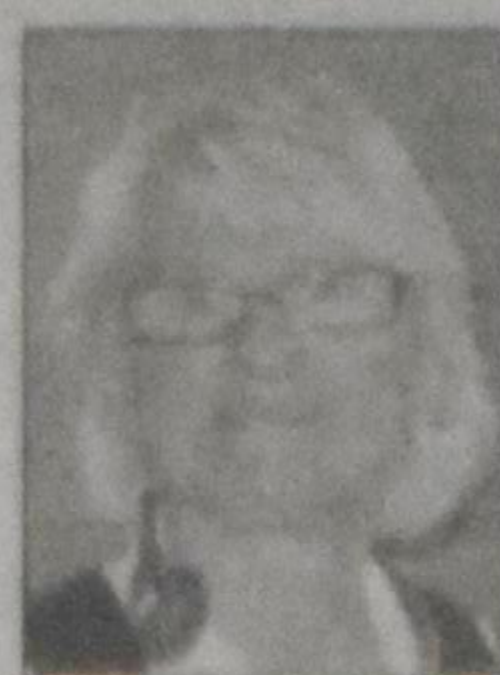


Curt Gesch writes mostly prose but occasionally works on short-line poems which have appeared in Christian Courier and The Banner.

Columns

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



Can I influence a spouse's negative outlook?

Q. I love my wife, don't get me wrong, but life from her perspective is one big negative experience. And I have to admit I do not understand it. Her attitude spills over to our relationship, as well as to her connection with our children – two of whom are married, and two who are still trying to find their independent feet. I feel that we have so much to be thankful for in our lives in terms of health and general family stability. I make a good living and there is room for a few extras such as travel and helping our children with the cost of their college education.

The struggles of life have not escaped me; I just do not believe in dwelling on them. A frivolous example is when we are out for a drive in the countryside. Most of my wife's comments are negative rather than expressing an appreciation for the beauty of nature. I noticed this tendency in her outlook when we were younger, but I naively assumed I could spread some of my joy to her and everything would be fine. Unfortunately, she is becoming more negative as we grow older and I am apprehensive about our future together if nothing changes.

A. You are at a loss about your wife's negative outlook on life. Unfortunately, it may have deep roots in her early life. While you are fortunate to have a sunny disposition, that difference may be a hindrance, at times, to a more deeper and satisfying relationship with your wife.

First, I would suggest you have a conversation with your wife in the presence of a pastor or therapist and try to understand your wife's early home environment as she was growing up. It does not have to be complicated, but often a negative bias towards life begins at home.

My second suggestion is for you to become aware of your own behaviour in terms of what you say and do when she tries to tell you her struggles. People with sunny dispositions often minimize the challenges of life because they only want to see the bright side and therefore miss the deeper connection that sharing the struggle could bring. It is also quite possible your wife has stored up resentment towards you because she has been unable to share important negative experiences with you and thereby keeping her cup full to the brim which, eventually, becomes the sieve through which she views all of life.

My third suggestion is that you support your wife as she becomes aware and accepts her negative bias so that she can develop a healthier outlook on life. The reality is our negative experiences stick like Velcro in our memories, while the good things we experience slide off us like Teflon. And so it would be helpful for your wife to actively become aware of the good things in her life, which will allow her to eventually become more in tune with "taking in the good" on a regular basis. This will not always be easy, since she developed certain habits early in life and changing them will take time. But prayer for patience in this area will help you both hang in there. Over time the good things she is experiencing will collect in her implicit memory deep in her brain and give her the confidence and resilience she needs in life while also lifting her energy and spirit!

I know you may be tempted to underestimate the power of these simple practices, but during the last decade researchers have been able to learn a lot about the complexity of the brain. The reality is that we can, gradually, change our brain through what is called "experience-dependent neuroplasticity." If you're interested in this, you can google the term to learn more about it. While the details are complex, the key point is simple: how you use your mind changes your brain – for better or worse.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, BC.

Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



For over a decade, along with other volunteers, I taught a Sunday school class for children with special needs. It was indeed a special learning time. Particularly for me!

One of those students, John Curtis, has Down syndrome. At eight years old, he was shy and not very verbal. He could communicate with his family, but I could hardly understand him.

I learned patience. I did my best to interact with John Curtis on his own terms. I prayed with him about his family and praised his faithful giving, a loonie every week. When we finished our lesson, we played games. Slowly, he warmed up to me. It took years, but we finally got to a place of relaxed friendship. He would tell me which game he wanted to play instead of pointing. He liked Pop-o-matic Trouble the best. He'd pop the bubble and urge on the dice with Vegas enthusiasm: "C'mon, six!"

Once he mentioned a girl that he liked at school. I couldn't quite make out her name. "Nancy?" "Francine?" He wrote down the first letter: A. Finally I guessed, "Angie"? "Yes!" he shouted in delight. "That's it! You got it! Good job!"

Right now I'm reading *Far from the Tree* by well-known journalist Andrew Solomon. Solomon, who's gay, explores the parenting of children who are "far from the tree," who present unfamiliar needs to their parents, as he once did to his. He investigates families coping with deafness, dwarfism, Down syndrome, autism, schizophrenia, multiple severe disabilities, prodigies, children from rape, children who become criminal and those who are transgender.

It's a sobering read. Parenting is a navigational nightmare for many of these families. Marriages wither. Parents burn out. Some operate in a vacuum, with inadequate information and no support. Others are bombarded by competing opinions almost immediately. Fierce divisions exist within the communities that spring up around these conditions. Those who support prenatal screening, with the option of abortion, against those who stand for the sanctity of life, calling for respite care, educational programs and appropriate housing. Those who lobby on behalf of their particular disability in order to procure government funding against those who defiantly reject being labelled. Take the issue of dwarf-tossing, for example. Yes, you read that right. Some Little People are mobilizing to have this "sport" outlawed. Aside from its inherent indignity, the activity is hazardous to skeletal structure already compromised at birth. Yet other Dwarfs vigorously oppose such advocacy, asserting their right to a lucrative income. Even the use of identifiers such as Little People and Dwarfs is divisive and debatable.

Disorder or diversity?

Ethical complexities surround "identity" versus "illness" in our culture. Solomon points out that the very existence of genetic screening exerts enormous medical and social pressure to use it. Michael Bérubé, a disabilities advocate, cites a study which showed that women who do not use prenatal testing or who continue a pregnancy knowing the child will have a disability "were judged more responsible, more to blame, and less deserving of both sympathy and social aid." The ramifications gather coldly in the

Not Far from the Tree



John Curtis and his favourite game.

subterranean currents of public opinion. Put bluntly, if you choose to have a child who requires costly educational support or expensive medical intervention, don't count on society to help shoulder the burden.

Or, to highlight another dilemma, consider this. The Deaf culture has finally achieved a notable level of public acceptance after centuries of marginalization. Now that culture is being undermined, however, and potentially even dismantled, by the increasing popularity of cochlear implants. Similarly, just as Little People move into mainstream media and political influence, gaining a respect often denied in the past, treatments such as limb-lengthening and cosmetic surgery are emerging as attractive options to the next generation.

Is the problem the disability or the societal discrimination against those who are "different"? In light of Solomon's research, the question reveals itself as hopelessly reductionist. Sometimes it's the impairment, sometimes it's the prejudice and, often, it's both. Moreover, whether by way of "selective termination" or by advances in medical technology, reducing a "diverse" population has consequences. As Solomon warns, "Accommodations are contingent on population; only the ubiquity of the disability keeps the disability rights conversation alive at all. A dwindling population means dwindling accommodation."

Back to my friend John Curtis. When we see each other at church, he gives me a hug. I give him a smile and ask how he's doing. He belongs; I belong. Both broken; both redeemed; both loved by God. Solomon's book is significant, but it doesn't offer a more hopeful or better answer than this: John Curtis and I are not far from the Tree at all. We're branches, grafted on the one true Vine.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Columns



Our World Today

Bert Hielema



The heading is the title of a book about a village in Friesland, the Netherlands. Geert Mak, the author, entitled it *Hoe God verdween uit Jorwerd*. A son of a Reformed minister and now a celebrated writer who abandoned the church, he spent time in Friesland where he observed the fundamental changes there during the 1950s and beyond.

Jorwerd was a typical, close-knit rural community, where the grocer, the butcher, the baker, the farmer and the smith all had their respected places until cheap energy gave the farmer the milk machine, eliminating a farm hand, afforded him a tractor, retired his horse and enabled him to buy a bailer, which furloughed another farmhand. The ascent of the automobile also meant that people could live there but work and shop in the nearby city, with cheaper prices and greater variety. Slowly the baker, the grocer and the butcher lost their clients and within a decade the village lost its soul, and with its soul gone, God too left, evident from the empty churches.

I believe that Jorwerd typifies our present world where God too has disappeared. I base this also on Deut. 32:20: "I shall hide my face from them; I shall see what their end will be." I believe that God has withdrawn from this world, and that international capitalism has taken over: Mammon now has the final word everywhere. God left to see what we, humans, make of it without his presence. My so-called pessimism is based on that premise.

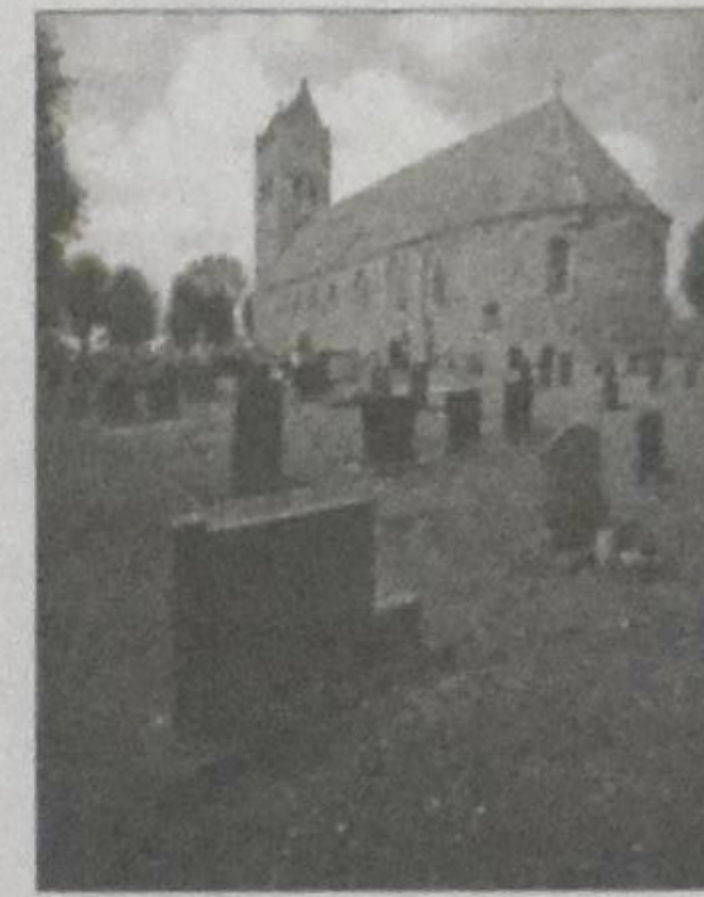
The Jorwerd phenomenon is now a universal event. Manufacturing has gone to Asia, where labour and coal are

cheap. We don't mind the extra pollution and loss of jobs as long as we get bargains. Our personal prayers do not prevent the tragedies that are playing out all over the world – such as hundreds of textile workers burning to death, thousands of coal miners losing their lives and cancers out of control – as long as we save money. God is gone. He is gone in government, in business, in education with the very odd exception, while still living in the hearts of a surprising scattering of people world-wide.

A shattered Kingdom

In the past couple of months I have been translating Dr. J. H. Bavinck's book, now re-titled *We and Our World* (1942). It has deeply affected me. Here is one reason why. "There is no such thing as individual salvation," he writes. "All salvation is of necessity universal. The goal of our life can never be that we personally may enjoy God and be saved in him. The goal of our life can only be that we again become part of the wider context of the Kingdom of God, where all things are again unified under the one and only all-wise will of him who lives and rules for ever."

I concur, and dare say that most churches fail to confess that, let alone live it, because they and their adherents have lost a Kingdom vision. Bavinck argues that, "It is impossible to visualize the immense difference between the majestic harmonious unity of creation, as it emerged from God's hand, and the frantic, demon-dominated planet in which we, the cursed humanity, dwell after the fall into



An abandoned church in Jorwerd.

sin. The Kingdom is in shatters. That is the profound tragedy confronting the life of the world. This goes far beyond the fact that we have ripped up its cohesion: it actually means that God has surrendered his own creation to Satan and his followers, whose only purpose is to abuse it and destroy it." Yes, God is hiding his face.

I believe that to be true. When the Lord asks us to "Seek first the Kingdom," that simply means to seek the welfare of God's creation – which include animals and plants, water and air – and somehow prepare ourselves for that

Kingdom to come.

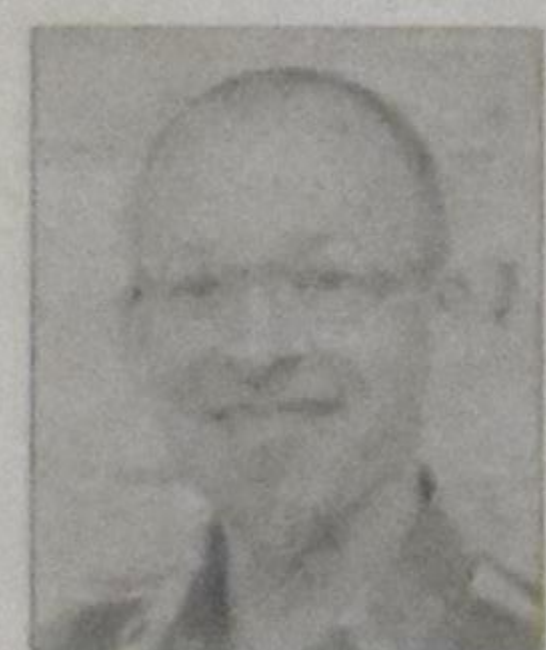
Our efforts to have our cake and eat it too have resulted in a mammoth debt to Mammon, so to speak, too big to be ever repaid. Environmental debt too is totally out of control, and also beyond remedy. Our lifestyles and lack of love for all that lives and moves and has its being, we have caused God to disappear from the world. ➤

This is my very last column. I have decided to write a weekly column exclusively for the web, where last year more than 35,000 people visited hielema.ca/blog, from all over the world, mostly non-Christians. For more than 30 years Christian Courier has been tolerant enough to publish my not always uplifting writings. By the time you read this column, I will have already posted three new articles on hielema.ca. Join me there. Bert@hielema.ca.



Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin



What happens when we don't see the fruit of our faithful prayers? When the loved ones we so desperately pray for seem distant and far off? When our mind thinks, "what's the use anyway?" Then our hearts can become cold and indifferent and it's easy to blame God and insist that he just isn't keeping up his end of the bargain. Why isn't God answering?

To be honest, I don't know. I'd like to think that no one has the answer, or at least not a pat answer to make someone who is in this place feel better. I wonder about this issue, though, because I see lots of unanswered prayer, or at least prayers not answered in the way we want.

God in his sovereignty is in control of everything. He is the most powerful Creator that has ever existed and that will ever exist. If we believe this, we can also believe that because of his sovereignty everything passes through his hands – the good, bad and ugly. Does it mean he is indifferent or uncaring? Does it mean that he turns his eyes when bad things happen or when people make choices that are not the best ones to make?

We all are a product of the fall. We are born into sin. So right from the beginning that is our inherent struggle. This doesn't mean that we can make light of sin or blame something or someone else, but it's important to understand that to some degree, this is our human heritage. Our flesh wages war with the spirit. We do the things we don't want to do and we don't do the things we want to do, which is simple yet so complex in many ways.

Couple this with the cultural influences and the spir-

Hearing God

its and authorities that also wage war on our souls, we are fighting a bigger fight than maybe we even realize. When our prayers seemingly do not go answered, the enemy can have a party with our mind bringing doubts that nothing is happening, that we are ineffective, that there must be something wrong with us, that God is uninterested in our prayers or our loved one. Our hearts can grow bitter, cold and angry toward God.

All for his glory

In reality, however, God is not silent. If he knows the number of stars, the amount of hairs on our heads, if he imagined us even before our parents ever did, do you not think he cares? He is a just God who allows us to walk in the freedom of choice and free will, not wanting us to be robots or puppets in his hand. He gives us that freedom with hopes that when we reach maturity we will serve him whole-heartedly for the rest of our lives.

Sound idealistic, euphoric and too good to be true? For many of us, we struggle with emotional and relational deficits in our lives that cause us to grow up with deep needs still unmet. If we are not given the opportunity for God to come in and heal and fill those areas, we will fill them ourselves – with many things that are good for us, and many things that aren't. If God isn't the centre of that deficit, we miss the mark. It's not so much that God is silent; rather we have taken our neediness into our own hands, numbing our emotions so that we have a hard time hearing God and that still small voice speaking to us.

For years I silenced the voice of my heavenly Father. Instead of listening to his voice and the truth of my worth

It was no mistake

He takes what is used
masked and well hidden
binds every cord
and nail deeply driven

Paula Warkentin

as his son, I listened to the enemy who spoke deceiving yet alluring lies to me. Through it all, God was still speaking and many people continued to pray for me, not giving up, even though they may have felt like it. I eventually heard his voice and he is now speaking truth to the lies that were fed to me and ones I believed.

As we go into 2013, remember that prayers work. Continue to pray for your loved ones – the ones who have been lied to, cheated and robbed, not by God, but rather by an enemy who hates them. Pray without ceasing and long for the day when they come to know they are loved sons and daughters of the highest King, the creator of everything. That they may know that nothing has been wasted and that God will and does use everything the enemy meant for harm for his good and for his glory. ➤

Kenny Warkentin (kenny66@gmail.com) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.

News

Ethno-religious violence affects all women: Nigerian Christian defends 'groundbreaking' thesis

Wendy Helleman

As in Canada, Nigerians teaching at the tertiary level are required to have a doctorate. But how does a Nigerian woman acquire a doctorate? The short answer is: with plenty of determination. Over the years Nigerians have gone abroad to the U.K. or the U.S. for a prestigious degree, but many who complete those studies do not return to their home countries. With this problem in mind, *Christian Studies International* (CSI) sends Christian professors to countries like Nigeria to teach and guide students in their graduate studies.

In 2002, Rebecca Dali had been teaching in Bukuru (near Jos) at the *Theological College of Northern Nigeria* (TCNN) for some years, and wondering how she would obtain a doctorate. Going overseas was out of the question. Her husband Sam was already working on his doctorate in the U.K., and she was caring for their six children. Then the University of Jos (Unijos) opened up its graduate program in Religious Studies for students like herself who had a master's degree from a theological college. She would be required to take a second master's degree to enter the Ethics and Philosophy program. I met Rebecca when she signed up for the graduate course I was teaching, "Science and Awareness of God."

At the time, Rebecca had already started the research for her master's thesis on the effect of violent conflict on women. After the Jos crisis of 2001, she had followed up on Muslim and Christian women who, like herself, had been deeply affected by that event. She asked them many questions about injuries sustained, trauma and the various kinds of loss suffered during the crisis. The result was a thesis which argued that because of their pivotal role in the family and society, such crises were more devastating for women than for men.

Not only Christians who suffer

Rebecca Dali's doctoral thesis became an extension of her earlier work. This time she focused on the Northern Nigerian communities Kaduna (the crisis of 2000) and Maiduguri (the 'cartoon' crisis of 2006): "An Ethical Analysis of the Plight of Women in Violent Conflict in Northern Nigeria (1980-2008)." Using evidence from interviews and discussions, Rebecca argued that the plight of women in ethno-religious violent conflict has been grossly underestimated and that, contrary to public perception, Muslim women are as seriously affected by these crises as Christian women. Rebecca discovered that systemic abuse of women, especially rape and other forms of torture, was out of proportion to the involvement of women in these conflicts. Unlike in North America, Nigerians still treat public discussion of these matters as taboo. Rebecca received first-hand reports be-



Wendy working with Rebecca to prepare for the oral defense.

cause she won the trust of her respondents. The *Church of the Brethren*, which she represents, is known for its pacifist stand. Her forthright discussion was also possible because she was herself a woman. Her goal in publicizing the devastating consequences of such conflict for women was to shake the conscience of the perpetrators.

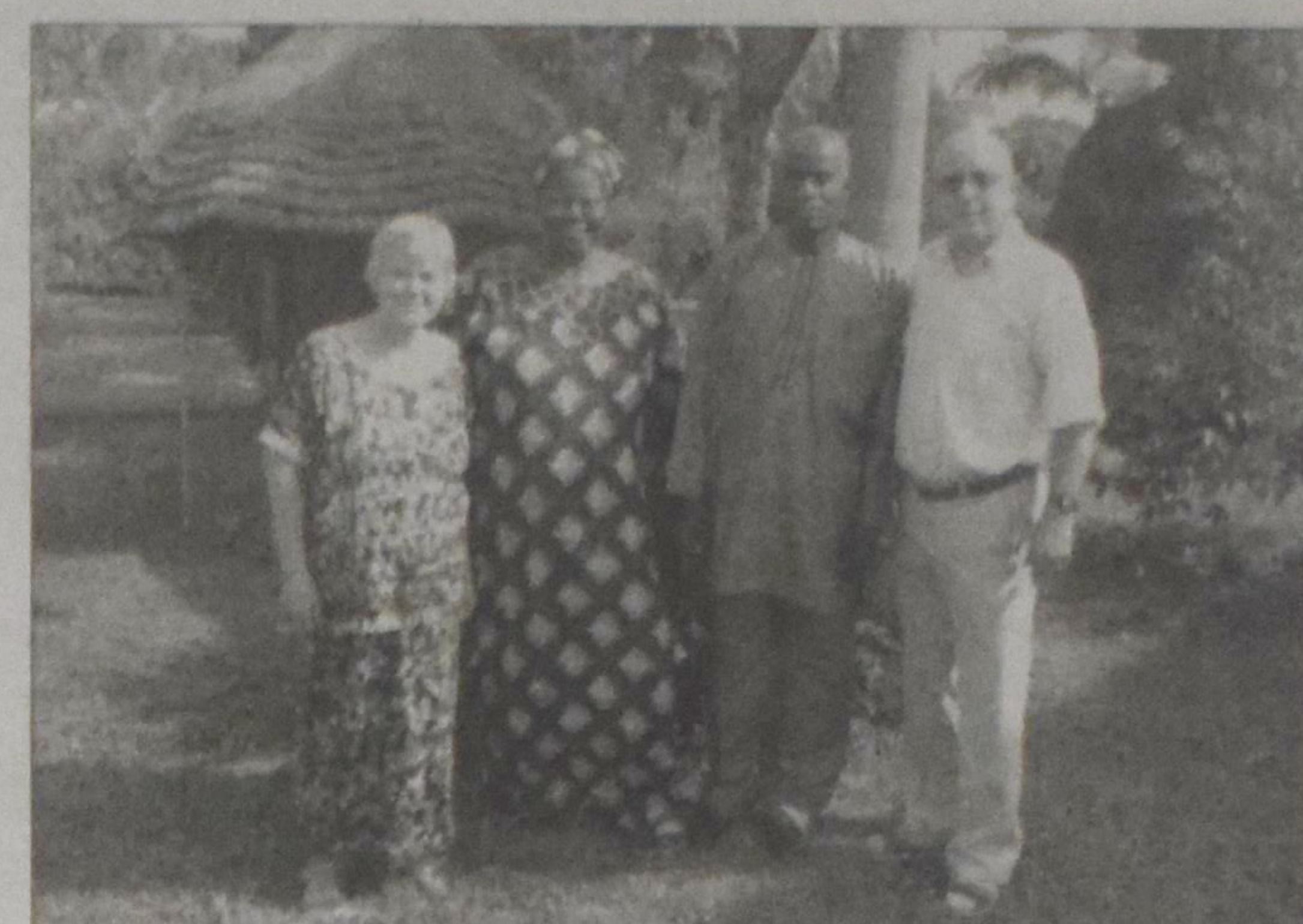
The completed thesis was submitted to the Department of Religion and Philosophy of Unijos last June. Dali's formal examination was held November 5, 2012. After receiving a barrage of criticism, Rebecca's work was affirmed as "groundbreaking," and worthy of the doctoral degree.

Contrary to public perception, Muslim women are as seriously affected by these crises as Christian women.

A religious blend

Many years of educational effort came to a climax with this examination. Rebecca now serves the *Church of the Brethren* (EYN in Nigeria) with her husband Sam, who has become its executive president. But she began life in a family characterized by a thorough mix of Nigeria's major religious groups: Muslim, Christian and traditional African religion. She remembers rote memorization of Islamic prayers of early childhood, but her herbalist father was more interested in having her help in brewing his products than in providing for her education. One day her older sister rescued her and had her placed in a mission school. Even without proper clothes for schooling, Rebecca started school, working in the fields at harvest to earn money for tuition and a uniform.

Rebecca hoped to go on to secondary schooling, but her parents had other plans; she was promised in marriage as third wife to a much older man. With much difficulty she escaped, and managed to get accepted at a girls' boarding school. Once again she paid for her own room and board, uniform, books and tuition by helping the teachers with their housework. She did well, and successfully completed the program at the



Time for celebration: Wendy, Rebecca, Sam and Adrian (l to r).

regional Women Teachers' College. After her marriage to Sam, Rebecca continued teaching until 1983, when EYN sponsored both Sam and Rebecca for theological training at TCNN. Upon completion, she taught for six years at EYN's Kulp Bible College. But in 1993 the Basel Mission of Switzerland sponsored her for further studies, both a Bachelor's and Master's degree at TCNN.

Except for a leave of absence to complete her doctorate, Rebecca has continued teaching at TCNN, although at the moment she is teaching and preaching in the north eastern section of Nigeria. She has established an NGO to help women victims of ethno-religious violence, sorely needed because of ongoing violence in that part of Nigeria. Indeed, we anticipate that Rebecca's work on the consequences of violent conflict for women will become an important resource for those who seek to assist women affected by conflict.

Wendy taught, with her husband Adrian, at the University of Jos from 2002-2008. Even after retirement she has continued supervision of graduate students, largely by email. The Hellemans served under the auspices of Christian Studies International, the Canadian arm of the International Institute for Christian Studies based in Kansas City, Kansas.



Rebecca with Prof. Gaiya and Wendy the day of her defense.


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Classifieds / Advertising

Birthdays



Happy 90th Birthdays
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will welcome friends to an **Open House** at the Edelweiss in St. Elizabeth Village from 2:00-4:30 pm on Saturday February 2, 2013

Best wishes only.

Obituary

On Jan. 7, 2013
our much-loved Wife, Mom, and Grandma,
Martha Bill
began living in her eternal home with Jesus.

Her 73 years were marked by her love for her Lord, her family and friends, and the godly example she set for many. Her faithful life following her Lord and Saviour will continue to influence those who knew her.

Martha will be greatly missed by her husband of 53 years, Louis, and their five children: Pam and Harry Stam, Jennifer and Bram Drost, Renée and Randy Nieuwsma, Barb and Ron Douwes, and Chris and Kelly Bill; and 20 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

Also surviving are brothers Peter and Clarence (Pat), sisters Rose (Mike) and Hazel (Larry), many nieces and nephews.

Pre-deceased by her parents, John and Pat Hogeterp, brothers Siebe and Henry, and sister-in-law Ruth.

A funeral service was held on Jan. 10, 2013 at Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, Jarvis, Ont. The family finds great comfort in Lord's Day 1.

Memorial contributions can be made to Hamilton District Christian High School.

Correspondence address: Louis Bill
2535 Hwy #3, Jarvis ON N0A 1J0

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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Feb 15-17 Marriage Encounter Weekend. Best Western Hotel & Conference Centre, St. Catharines. For information and to register, see reformedme.org.

To place an event, email admin@christiancourier.ca

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Job Opportunities

Job ads are also posted on our website at christiancourier.ca



is seeking a candidate for the position of **Director, Admissions**

The Director, Admissions is primarily responsible for engaging with the community for the purpose of building relationships with feeder schools, churches and community organizations, in support of achieving mission-critical enrollment targets. He/She directs all activities of Redeemer's Recruitment department. The Director is a key member of Redeemer's Enrollment Management Team (EMT) and has primary responsibility for ensuring that all efforts culminate in the recruitment of students.

To be successful in this role, the Director, Admissions must be a dynamic, outgoing relationship builder, successful at driving results through others and possessing the ability to establish rapport quickly with internal and external stakeholders.

A complete outline of the position can be found at www.redeemer.ca on the Employment Opportunities page.

Applicants are requested to email their application materials and include a statement that articulates their faith perspective and its relation to the mission of Redeemer University College to: HR@redeemer.ca

Cornerstone CRC of Chilliwack, BC
has an immediate opening for a half time

Director of Worship/Music.

The qualified applicant will have a deep love for Christ and His Church and a passion to give expression to our Reformed world-view utilizing a broad range of musical skills in a "blended" worship setting.

For a position description and to submit a resume and application please contact the church office at office@cornerstonecrc.ca or 1-604-792-2517.



Classifieds

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The Human Resource Team of **Mountainview Christian Reformed Church** in Grimsby is searching for a **Worship/Music Director**


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A job description for this position is available from Nelly Baarda at nbaarda@mountainviewcrc.org.

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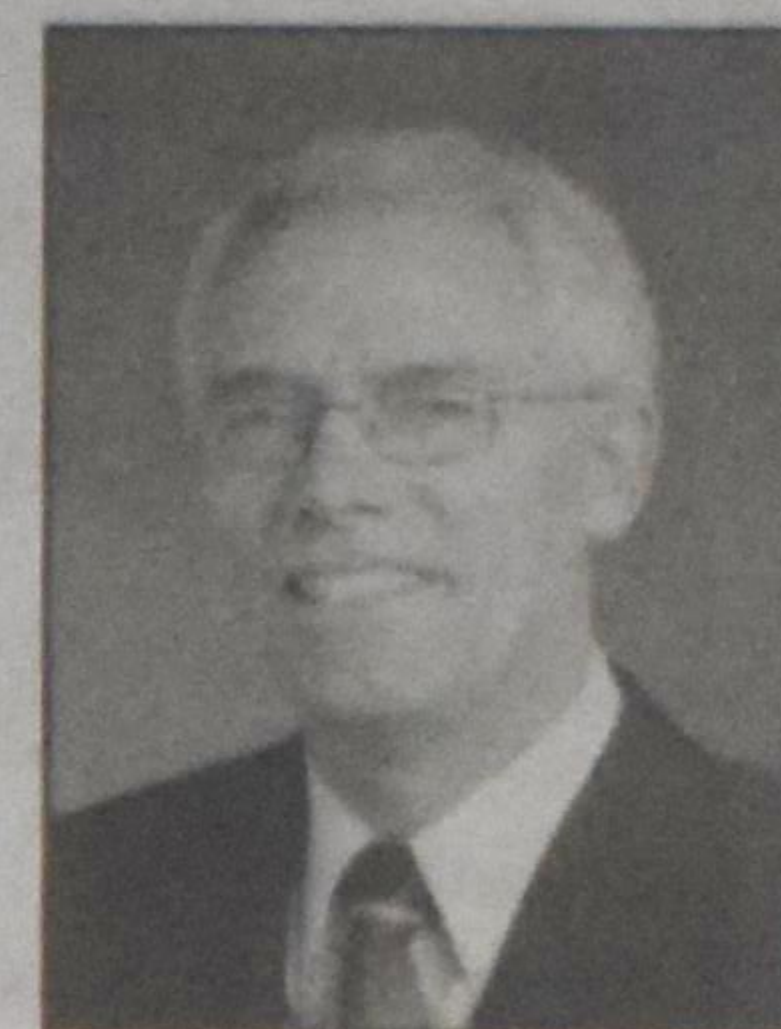
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News

Top five nations that use renewable energy

Leigh Montgomery (CSM)

Solar, wind, tidal and geothermal energy made up only 1.3 percent of total global energy use last year, but that's up 15.5 percent from the previous year. This is increasing due to policy and private investment, as well as commitments to reduce environmental impact and dependence on foreign energy sources. Here are the top five countries which are making use of renewable energy.

5. Brazil, 5 percent of world total

Renowned for its biofuel production, Brazil is also involved with developing technologies such as solar water heating, and for relationships with countries outside its region, such as China. Brazil boosted large investments into the wind sector through government auctions for contracts since introducing them in 2009. Brazil seeks to further renewable development and burnish its green credentials through supporting and attracting foreign investment into solar energy – as well as a pledge to have solar power in all 12 venues for the 2014 World Cup.

4. China, 7.6 percent of world total

China is the largest energy consumer and second-largest net importer of oil (as of 2009). China is also the global leader in clean energy sector investment, with half of its financing in wind.

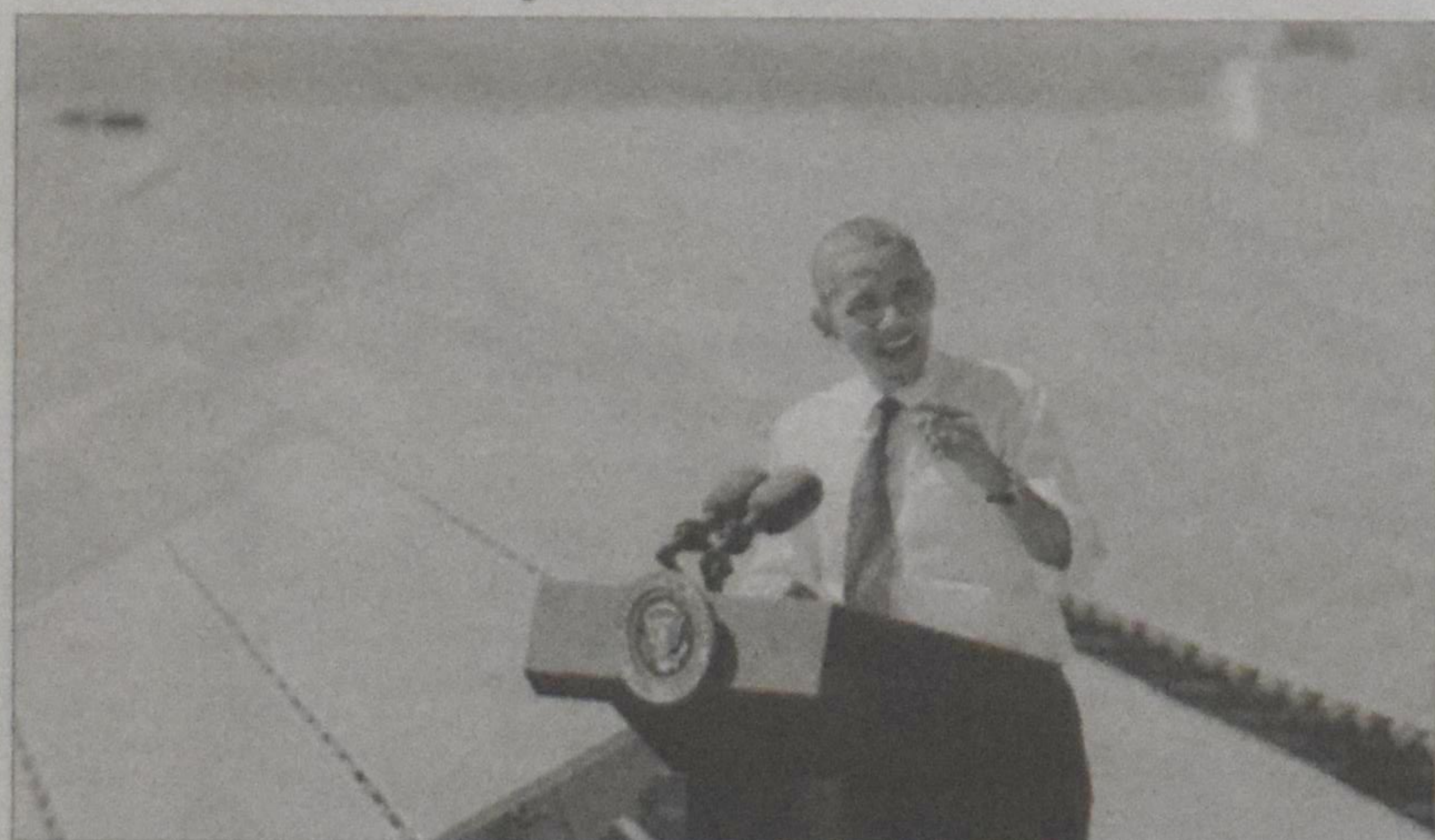
3. Spain, 7.8 percent of world total

Spain imports the majority of its energy, though in 2011 wind power became its largest source of electricity generation. Spanish producers are also building turbines and installing wind farms internationally, including in the U.S. Spain's clean energy market has been a magnet for investment over the past decade, though the Spanish government has halted subsidies for renewable energy investment as it is a debt-burdened economy.

2. Germany, 11.7 percent of world total

Germany has taken the controversial step of vowing to phase out nuclear power by 2022 in favour of other sources. It is the only country in the G-20 economic bloc to project a decline in clean energy investment, partly because of being an early leader in renewable energy as well as competition from Asian producers.

1. United States, 24.7 percent of world total



President Barack Obama speaks after touring Semptra's Copper Mountain Solar 1 facility in Boulder City, Nev., in this March 2012 file photo. President Obama supports wind and solar energy as cleaner alternatives to fossil fuels that trigger global warming.

The United States increase in alternative energy sources is increasing due to federal, state and local tax and other incentives, as well as mandated state goals. The United States is significantly behind China in its renewable sector investment intensity. Efforts to join international agreements or introduce long-term, large scale reductions in emissions have met with opposition in Congress and the private sector.

Leigh Montgomery is the librarian at the Christian Science Monitor (CSM) and researched the information for this article.

COMMENT

Lessons from First Nations

Ineke Medcalf-Strayer

Today I walked in solidarity with First Nations. The bills passed in the Government's omnibus bill were done without consultation with affected groups and without debate. Bill C45 is one of these. It violates First Nations' treaty and human rights. It changes the way First Nations decide how their lands are managed and takes away protection of their waterways.

First Nations peoples have learned much about God through Creation. After all, creation is God's revelation – it is a revelation we no longer heed.

"To the seventh generation"

There is a saying among First Nations communities and that is "to the seventh generation." I love that! In other words, any initiative is limited to what is good for the here and now, but it's considered in terms of how it will affect future generations and what long-term impact it will have on the land. It made me think of the verse "that God punishes the children for the sins of the fathers unto the third and fourth generations" (Ex. 20:5). The decisions we make now affect future generations. We forget that.

I was at a convention in Vancouver where a young girl of 14 or 15 asked when a political party was going to do what is right for her generation. The answer is never. People vote with their pocket books. Stephane Dion talked about doing what is right for our children and grandchildren and about wanting for others what we want for ourselves. But it got him nowhere.



Gathering before the march.



Talking to the media.

Mother Earth

We have also heard the term "Mother Earth" from First Nations. Think about it. Our bodies are made up of elements of the earth – we were created from the dust of the ground. Everything we need to sustain our physical bodies is from the earth. And it is with our physical bodies that we express our relationship to God. First Nations also speak of Father Sky, who gave us the breath of life, and Sister Water. They speak of the environment as family members deserving of respect.

They know that by polluting the earth, we pollute ourselves and our children. Can we love our neighbour and continue to allow our waterways to be poisoned? Can we love our neighbour and families as we continue to increase our carbon footprint? God speaks to us in creation but we have failed to listen. We treat creation as a commodity for personal gain, ignoring our interrelatedness.

I was at a meeting with David Suzuki. He talked about being in the emergency room in Toronto when a father brought in his child with a severe asthma attack. The father cared greatly for his child and would do anything to help his son. Suzuki noticed, however, that the father drove to the hospital in a SUV. He did not see the relationship between his lifestyle and his son's asthma.

I hope the First Nations win for the protection of their lands and water. Because then we all win. Their fight should be our fight. Short term visions should not dictate our policies, nor should our only measuring stick be the economy. All of us should be IDLE NO MORE.

Ineke Medcalf is administrator with Christian Courier living in St. Catharines, Ont.



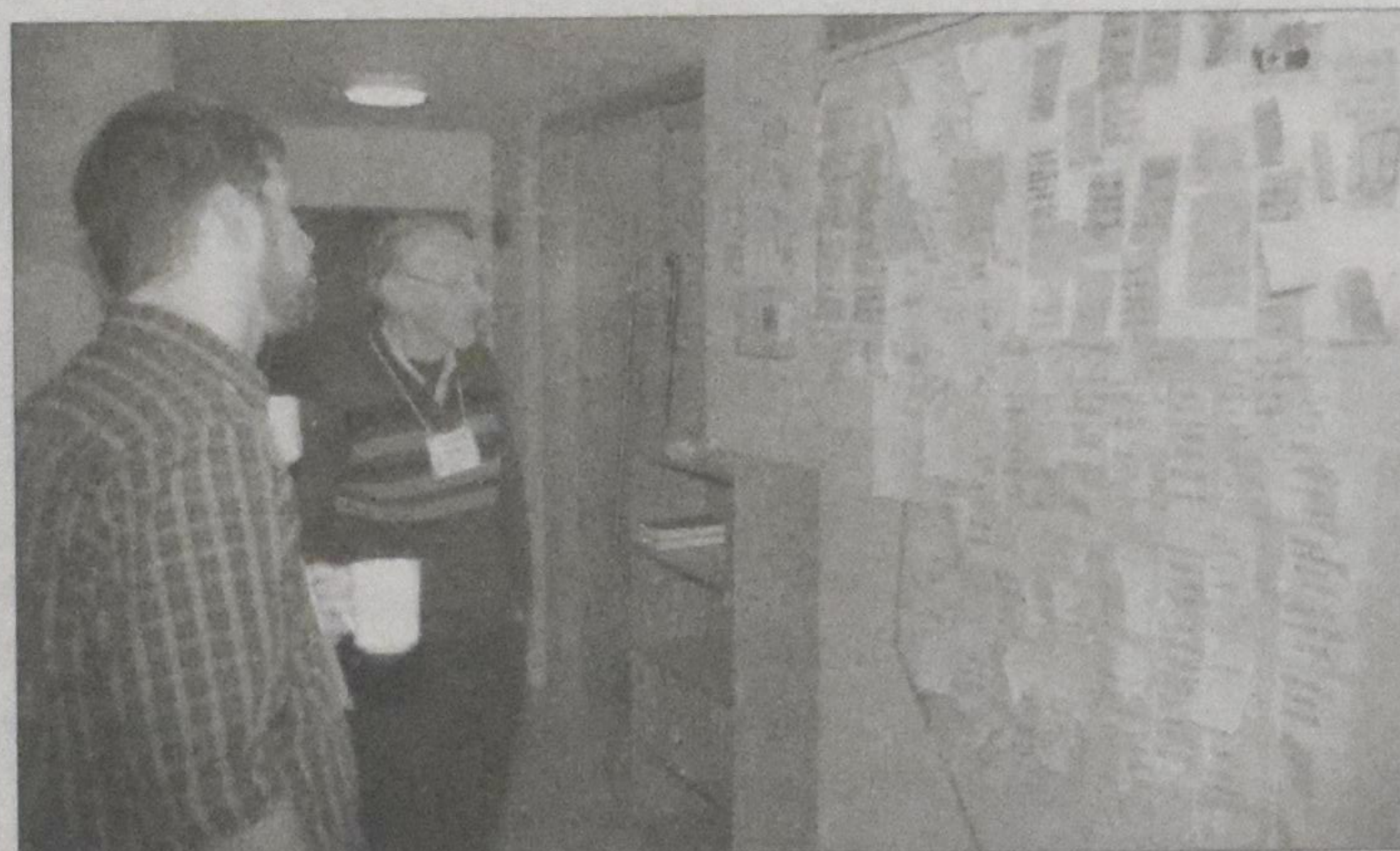
On January 16, I had the honour of participating in an IDLE NO MORE march in Niagara Falls. We started at Stanley and the 420. At the Rainbow Bridge we did a circle dance and then proceeded to Table Rock by the Houseshoe Falls. When someone offered their hand to have me join the dance, I did so – a real feat for me!

IDLE NO MORE has called a new global day of action for Jan. 28, 2013. It will be an opportunity for us to join in for political transformation, indigenous rights and environmental justice.

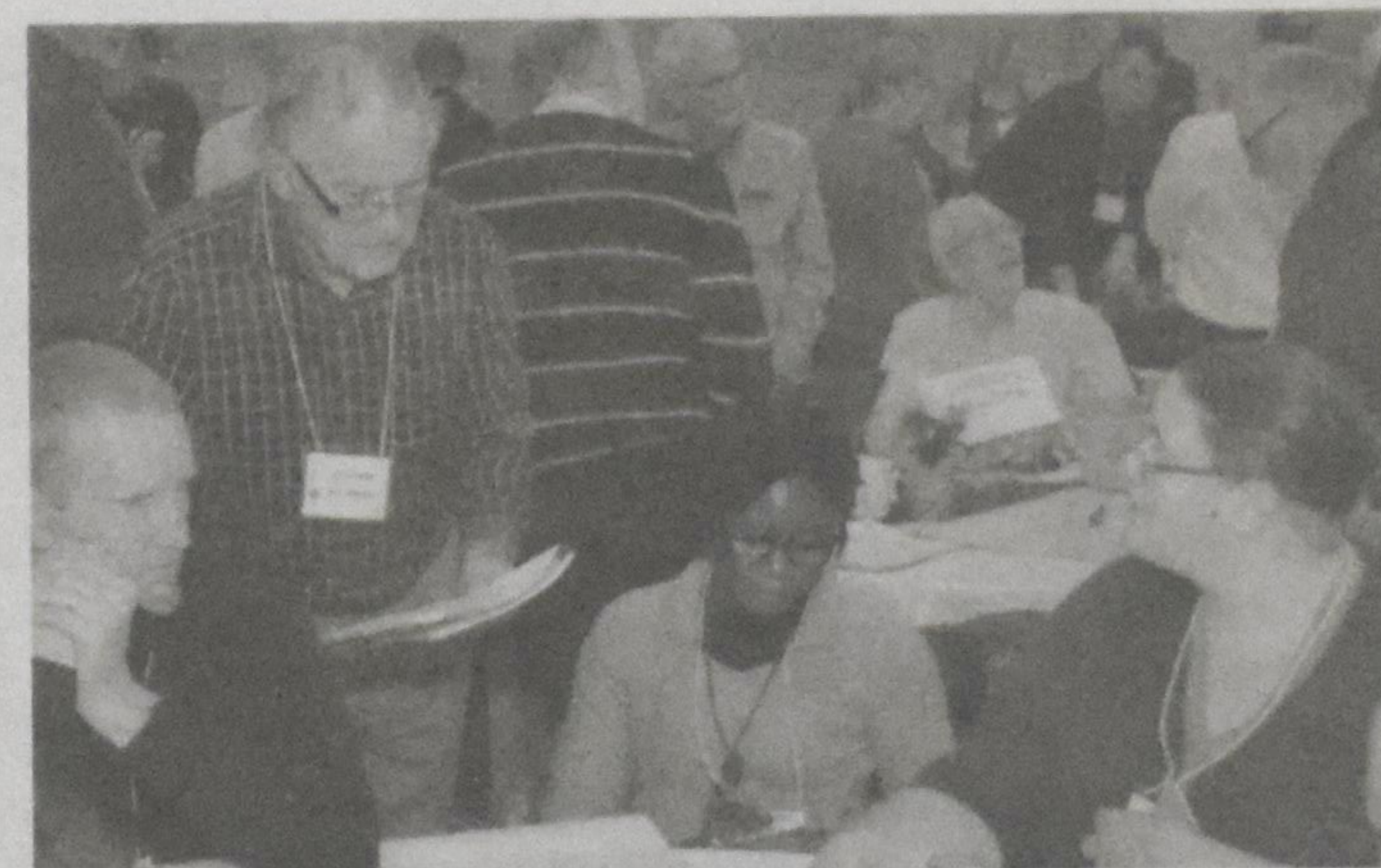
News



David Harlow, Tammy Heidbuurt and Carol Sybenga (l to r) discuss the resources that local CRC leaders need.



A wall of condensed conversations to consider (over coffee, of course).



Much seems to hinge on this question: Do our current structures work?

To be continued:

C3 Forum prompts vital discussions

Mark Wallace

On January 11th and 12th, 120 people gathered at Community Christian Reformed Church in Richmond Hill, Ontario, at the invitation of Classis Toronto. They were there to take part in the Canadian Catalytic Conversation, known more informally as the C3 Forum. Participants and observers came from every Classis in Canada and joined denominational staff from both Canada and the U.S. Rev. Joel Boot, Interim Executive Director of the CRC, Peter Borgdorff, Deputy Executive Director and Ben Vandezande, Interim Director of Canadian Ministries were all in attendance. The C3 Forum marked the first time since 2002 that there has been such a gathering of Canadian CRC members. The event was marked by lively and deeply engaging conversations and a desire to see the CRC address the particularity of the Canadian context to fully participate in God's mission.

The goal of the organizers was to promote catalytic conversations to spark new and more effective ministry in Canada, and to be able to speak into the ongoing work of the denominational Structure and Culture Task Force whose mandate includes a look at the question of bi-nationality. There is a long history in the CRC of trying to learn how to be a church that respects our differences as two nations while existing as a larger covenant community pursuing God's mission in North America. Specifically, the organizers invited the participants to discuss this question: "What is God calling us to do in our unique Canadian context and what are the

leadership, structure and strategy(ies) required to do this?"

Status quo not an option

The tone for the event was set on January 11 with addresses by Rev. Richard Bodini, Rev. Sam Cooper and Rev. Martin Contant. Bodini outlined some of the history and concerns that led Classis Toronto to host the forum, as well as explaining some of the challenges faced by the Canadian CRC as it works within the structures of a bi-national denomination. Cooper led a participatory time of reflection and prayer drawing on Joshua 5 and Ephesians 6. Contant delivered a summary of the state of the CRC in Canada that made it clear the denomination is in a time of deep crisis and tremendous opportunity. Maintaining the status quo is not an option.

Interactive and conversation-focused, the event was designed so that participants were continually changing conversation partners and listening to diverse viewpoints. Wendy Gritter, Rika VanderLaan and Chris Pullenayegem served as facilitators for the discussions, helping everyone dig into the questions at hand and report on the results of their discussions. The walls were quickly covered with newsprint posters, colourful sticky notes and diagrams.

As the forum unfolded, it appeared there were two main conversations taking place. The first focused on the challenges of being the church in a changing Canadian context. These discussions zeroed in on the first half of the forum question: "What is God calling us to do in our unique Canadian context?" Driven

by concerns of declining membership, the exodus of young adults from congregations and a recognition that CR churches seem increasingly isolated and out of touch with the communities in which they live, participants explored what it means to be the church in this particular time and place.

The diversity present across the country soon became evident. One exercise included grouping characteristics of the CRC under the categories of preserve, change or toss. Occasionally the same item, such as Christian education, for example, was listed under each category, indicating the variety of experiences, perspectives and priorities of those present.

The second conversation focused on the last half of the forum question: "what are the leadership, structure and strategy(ies) required . . . ?" Delegates shared experiences, frustrations, hopes and ideas relating to the Canadian experience within a bi-national denomination. Clear calls for greater autonomy for both the Canadian Corporation Board of Trustees and the denominational ministries and agencies centered in the Burlington, Ontario offices were heard. As with the first conversation, there was a diversity of perspectives and solutions put forward, a number of which appeared incompatible. Again, it appeared that the Canadian CRC is faced with the particularities of the Canadian context rather than a singular particularity.

Measurable progress

With the clock running out and the conference winding rapidly to a close, a

team of writers worked hard to produce a draft "shared statement of understanding" to reflect the discussions and recommendations arising from the forum. When this was presented orally and on-screen by Peter Noteboom to the delegates, it was clear that there would not be enough time to reach common agreement on what had been written. Rather than a consensus statement from the forum, then, it has been offered by Classis Toronto as a representative summary of the discussions. The statement, along with an executive summary, can be downloaded at sites.google.com/site/c3canadianforum.

At first glance, it seems the C3 Forum ended without consensus, and without achieving its stated goal of a shared statement of understanding. It was certainly not unsuccessful, however. A wealth of information was gathered on sticky notes, chart paper and in discussion notes. This, along with the summary statement that was written, should provide the various denominational task forces with rich insights to help them in their tasks. Important conversations have begun which need to be nurtured in order to help them bear the fruit that was visible during the forum. It would be good to see these conversations followed up in congregations and Classes across the country prior to Synod 2013.

Mark Wallace works bi-nationally in Campus Ministries for Home Missions. He lives in Guelph.



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